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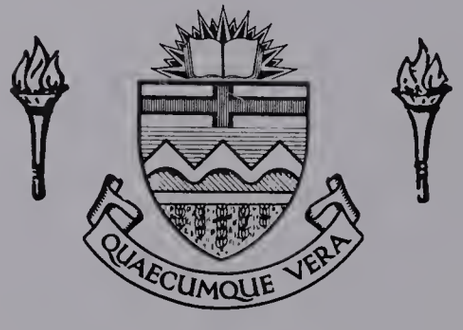

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THE FEMALE PROFESSION:

TALES OF FASHIONABLE LIFE

AS A TEXTBOOK

by

CATRIONA DE SCOSSA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Female Profession: Tales of Fashionable Life as a Textbook submitted by Catriona de Scossa in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Between 1795 and 1809, working both independently and co-operatively, Maria Edgeworth and her father Richard wrote Letters for Literary Ladies, Practical Education and Essays on Professional Education, a sequence of books designed to promote the education of women, children and professional men, though Letters for Literary Ladies was very brief. In 1809 and 1812 Maria Edgeworth published two collections of Tales of Fashionable Life. Part of their purpose, as Richard Edgeworth's preface indicated, was to make more widely accessible the ideas expressed in Essays on Professional Education.

Considering particularly the female characters in Tales of Fashionable Life, this thesis proposes that the Tales are a logical extension of their more overtly educational predecessors, and that they are, taken together, a textbook designed to educate women for the female profession: domesticity.

Maria Edgeworth's family life, education, reading habits and awareness of current affairs are examined, first to place her in a social and historical context, and then to determine her qualifications to write such a textbook mainly for women of her own class - the landed gentry.

Reasons for Maria Edgeworth's choice of the moral tale for her medium of instruction, instead of the essay or the novel, are adduced, and her consequent contribution to the language of fiction described.

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INTRODUCTION

The language and forms of fiction are never static, but in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries fiction was in a particularly fluid state. In historical terms too, this was a particularly volatile period politically, socially and economically. In much of Maria Edgeworth's work one sees both a remarkable understanding of social change in her time and a major contribution to the development of fiction as a medium to represent and comment on that change. In Tales of Fashionable Life in particular, the combination of her literary talents and the familial, educational and domestic environment which formed both her social awareness and her personal predilections worked to produce a series of stories of far greater consequence than their title implies, and which certainly goes beyond the purpose indicated by Richard Lovell Edgeworth's preface to his daughter's Tales. In it he explained that they were to "disseminate in a familiar form, some of the ideas that are unfolded in ESSAYS ON PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION."[1] Among the ideas were the importance of sound professional education, the need to be a responsible landlord, the necessity of paying debts, and the virtue of strength of mind. The successful professional man was exhorted to eschew the shallow pleasures of metropolitan living and extravagant conviviality. In fact, the life of the successful professional particularly that of the landowner, was to be exemplary.

> When we reflect upon the condition of the English country gentleman, we must perceive, that much of their happiness has arisen from their independence of mind; and much from their maintaining what is called independent fortunes. It was long their boast, their honest pride to despise show and frippery, to do without the luxuries of a city, yet,

> to live hospitably, and in a manner becoming their station. They paid their debts regularly. They thanked God, that they were independent of all men, and could speak their minds freely on every subject, private or public, without fear or reward. Between their independence of mind and fortune there is such an intimate connexion, that the one must be destroyed if the other be sacrificed. If country gentlemen, from the desire to make a figure in the metropolis, or to outshine their neighbors, enter into contests of extravagence and scenes of fashionable dissipation; if, instead of living upon their own estates and attending to their own affairs, they crowd to water-drinking places, and think only of hazard or Newmarket, the consequences must be, the ruin of their private fortunes, and the forfeiture of their political integrity.[2]

There is no question that all these ideas are conveyed in the Tales and Maria Edgeworth certainly uses many of her female characters as positive examples. She makes much of the importance of the position of the landowner's wife, especially in the final tale, "The Absentee" which may be seen not simply as the last, but as the climactic story. However, the Tales are also considerably more than mere didactic expressions of moral imperatives in standard fictional form. From examining especially the principal female characters, and their relations with and effects on the male characters, it appears that the Tales are, in fact, a female version, in the guise of fiction, of both Practical Education and Essays on Professional Education. Maria Edgeworth's Tales of Fashionable Life are, taken together, a textbook designed to educate middle and upper class women for the female profession - domesticity.

"Profession" and "professional" applied to women are not to be equated with the terms as they are used by Richard Edgeworth in relation to men. What is important is that Maria Edgeworth implied firmly that the attributes of the successful woman, of the properly supportive wife, mother or daughter of a professional man, were not naturally occurring, but had to be taught and learned. In the Tales of Fashionable Life Maria

Edgeworth depicts the successful practice of domesticity, and demonstrates the inherent, and particularly the acquired, qualities necessary for success.

Maria Edgeworth's conception of domesticity as presented in the Tales of Fashionable Life is certainly a large one, going far beyond the daily management of home, family and servants and the narrow concerns of domestic economy. Rather, based on her presentation of female characters in the Tales, the woman, usually but not invariably a wife, is the sustaining force, though not necessarily central and certainly not publicly obvious, in domestic life. Founded in the propriety and calm of a well-ordered domestic life, the man of property or profession, including the profession of property-owning, is able to make sound contributions to public life. The foundation is laid in childhood by a mother, developed by her in adolescence, and built on in adulthood by a wife. The importance of the female element in domestic life, and in determining the success of men in public life, is demonstrated in virtually all the Tales of Fashionable Life. The women may not be emancipated or enfranchised, but, in a sense, political power is secondary to domestic power because the former is shaped by the latter. Maria Edgeworth's Tales are a microcosmic demonstration of the maxim that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Because of the great power of women, Maria Edgeworth considered it vital that women be educated with especial care to ensure that the power was wielded properly. Maria Edgeworth's concern was in tune with her times. Although she may have had little in common with the more provocative Mary Wollstonecraft, they shared a deep concern that women be educated to occupy an intelligent and respected place in society.[3]

With remarkable economy, the Tales describe the practicalities of female education; discuss the desirable personal, intellectual and moral traits which will be fostered by such education; consider the evil consequences which will result from improper or insufficient education; stress the key role that women play in the intellectual and moral formation of other human beings; present a pattern for ideal bourgeois and upper class domestic life and demonstrate how domestic life, for good or ill, determines the course of public life. This sounds like a very ambitious undertaking. Yet, because of the peculiar circumstances of Maria Edgeworth's own education and life she was equipped to carry out the project successfully, and almost as a side effect, to make a lasting impression on the language of fiction.

Unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth had a didactic message for a large but socially restricted female audience. She spoke principally to "the gentry", to members of her own social class. She addressed women who belonged to the higher reaches of the middle class and to the minor aristocracy; who might well be the wives and daughters of younger sons. Such women might well belong to the family of a man who either because of social obligations or expectations, or sometimes because of financial need, practised a profession. Although in her Tales Maria Edgeworth depicts characters higher and lower on the social scale than her main audience, they are there to reinforce the message about the responsibilities and the relative position of "the gentry".

A brief critical account of Maria Edgeworth's life and education, and of her father's, is necessary to show her uncommon breadth of domestic

and educational experience and social and political understanding, and to see how it qualified her to take on the considerable task of writing on female education for the good of mankind. Maria Edgeworth was born into a family which provided ample material for her Tales and her other writing, both in an anecdotal sense and by surrounding her daily with examples of successful and failed educational processes and domestic relationships. She grew up and lived with an unusual number of stepmothers and whole- and half-brothers and sisters. Although she never married, she had, because of her father's four marriages, a considerable experience of the effects of marriage, not only on the partners, but on the offspring. She also understood marriage not as a romantic affair, but as a working social relationship with domestic and public consequences. Of the absolutely private elements of marriage she was, apparently, ignorant. But this is inconsequential as far as her moral and social teaching is concerned. For her Tales deal less with the hearts of her characters than with their minds, not with their interior lives, but with their lives lived in relation to other people. She deals with them as individuals in an egalitarian social setting where over-emphasis on one individual would deny another reasonable freedom of action. Her social context is that described by Randolph Trumbach, one where parents and children had increasingly informal and extensive dealings with each other.[4] Maria Edgeworth's own education, and her domestic, social and professional experience and knowledge gained by reading and discussion, were sufficiently out of the ordinary and extensive to qualify her thoroughly to prescribe for others. Also, her social position, her nationality and her awareness of these in the context of current events equipped her to write on the large scale belied by the modest dimensions of the Tales. In fact, in

its daily events, much of Maria Edgeworth's life, for all its unusual elements, exemplified the informal, but still polite, existence that became the norm at a certain social level in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, according to Mark Girouard.[5] Reading, working, conversing intelligently, enjoying the company of family and close friends - these were becoming the stuff of a good life for "the gentry" in the sixty years from 1770 to 1830. Maria Edgeworth knew this, approved, proselytised for, and practised the new domesticity.

The way in which Maria Edgeworth learned her family history, received the bulk of her education and obtained information on current events must be remembered, for this was crucial in developing her literary style as well as shaping her ideas. For the greater part of her life Maria Edgeworth lived in a secluded family setting. Conversation, reading aloud and writing and performing plays were among the most favoured family recreations. The most valuable part of her education she received from her father and her second stepmother, Elizabeth. Her father's contributions made her privy to the otherwise unpublished ideas of many of the great scientific and technological thinkers of the day. So, a domestic form of language, well-informed conversation, was one in which she was particularly fluent. Through conversations she learned the facts about her family background which provided matter for the Tales; she also learned about chemistry and astronomy and about educational theory. She also read widely, but even some of her reading was subtly turned into "monologue conversation" by being read aloud. Maria Edgeworth had a highly developed sense of language as a listener as well as a writer and a talker, and this fact added to her scope as a writer. She

also wrote hundreds of letters, many of them to absent members of the family, and this actively developed a gift for lively anecdotal writing. Family interest in dramatic performances, as well as familiarity with the work of English and French dramatists, combined with the importance of conversation in her life to make Maria Edgeworth an adept writer of fictional but realistic conversation. Her flair for the realistically dramatic enabled her to present domestic life as interesting and attractive without denaturing it, and so risking that the reader would be disappointed with his or her own existence. She aimed for quite the reverse. For example, the obviously dramatic lives of Almeria and of Lord Glenthorn in "Ennui", and the spuriously dramatic life of Mrs. Beaumont in "Manoeuvring" are meant to strike the reader as exhausting, boring and, ultimately, disappointing and fruitless. Believing what she wrote, and drawing on a good deal of vivid personal experience, Maria Edgeworth infused her didactic Tales with the charm of possible virtue, and a sense of the contentment of the good life lived well.

CHAPTER I

The Making of a Didactic Fiction Writer

Maria Edgeworth was the second surviving child and first daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth. She remained, for all her eighty-one years of life, a dutiful daughter, first to her father throughout his life and then to his spirit after his death when she was forty-nine, and finally to a succession of stepmothers, the last of whom was over a year her junior, and outlived her. She was also old enough to have been the grandmother of her last born half-brothers. Even for the late eighteenth century Maria Edgeworth's family life was unusual in many of its aspects, although it was also quintessentially a late eighteenth, early nineteenth century life.[1]

She was born in 1768, on January 1, to Richard Edgeworth's first wife, Anna Maria Elers. (At fifteen, during a drunken party he was "married" as a joke. Edgeworth's father took the joke seriously and had the marriage formally annulled, going to great lengths first to prove that any marriage existed.) Edgeworth's first real marriage, the only unhappy one, was miserable from the beginning but, incidentally, provided material for some of his daughter's stories. In fact, he was, in his early years, very like the principal character of the first of the Tales of Fashionable Life, "Ennui", Lord Glenthorn - bored, addicted to gambling, dancing, drinking, and card-playing. He met Anna Maria when he was sent to Oxford to study law, an attempt at educating him at Trinity College, Dublin, having been a signal failure. At Oxford, Edgeworth lived in the house of Paul Elers, supposedly profitting from his experience as a lawyer and a landlord. Elers was an unsuccessful practitioner of both professions, but he was

successful at producing daughters. Edgeworth fell fleetingly in love with the eldest. The infatuation, though brief, resulted in some action on Edgeworth's part that made him feel in honour bound to marry Anna Maria even though they did not love each other. However, he knew very well that his father would not allow the marriage, and he was a minor. Consequently, though very much out of love, he and Anna Maria eloped to Scotland in 1763. These adventures provided more stuff for tales. The approaching birth of a child persuaded Edgeworth's father that his son should be properly married. In February, 1764, three months before the child was born, Richard and Anna Maria were married by license and set up house near Oxford. In spite of the loveless marriage Anna Maria produced five children in ten years, dying of puerperal fever in 1774.

Edgeworth spent little time in her company, preferring to travel abroad, attempting to educate his eldest son according to the principles described by Rousseau in Emile, and becoming increasingly involved with the work of the Lunar Society of Birmingham. This was an organisation of inventors, businessmen and scientists who met, or corresponded, to consider, and to produce, the new technological developments which came with the growth of the Industrial Revolution. The society's name is misleading, suggesting astrological interests. Instead, the solidly practical society took its name from the fact that meetings were held on Mondays closest to the full moon as its light facilitated travelling. Edgeworth, a man who had once delighted in the company of the roué, Francis Delaval, now preferred the intellectual companionship of men like Matthew Boulton, Josiah Wedgwood, Erasmus Darwin, James Watt and, by correspondence, Benjamin Franklin. His wife took no interest in these pursuits, preferring to manage her small household and help tend the

garden. She read little or nothing, but enjoyed trivial conversation with neighbours, or games of cards. The gap between husband and wife, never narrow, grew wider. Edgeworth was in France when she died. An indication of how little time he spent with his family is given by the fact that his daughter Maria, an alert five-year-old, did not recognise him when he returned after his wife's death.

Four months later Edgeworth married again; this time the marriage was a love-match to an intellectual equal, Honora Sneyd. Edgeworth and his wife were absolutely devoted, to the exclusion, practically, of everyone else, and this marriage marked the beginning of one of the unhappiest periods in Maria's life. It was also to provide the foundation for some of her ideas about marriage and family relationships expressed in Tales of Fashionable Life. Her stepmother was not only strict and chilly, but she also garnered all the attention that Maria was beginning to long for from her father. The clever Mrs. Edgeworth, interested in education and science, was the perfect companion for her husband. He needed no one else. To add to Maria's misery, she was sent away to school when she was seven. At Mrs. Latuffiere's school in Derby she was an apt pupil; too apt to be popular with her fellow students. But by now she had begun what was to be a lifelong undertaking - to be worthy of her father in intellect and duty. His estimation was far more important than that of her peers. And domestic rather than peer support was always most valuable to Maria Edgeworth. Besides being too clever to be popular, Maria was an odd figure physically, and this probably added to her woes. She never grew taller than a fraction more than four feet seven inches. At her second school, besides all the usual deportment exercises, she was

regularly hung in a stretching device in the forlorn hope of making her taller. Her eyes frequently troubled her, and, particularly in her youth, she had to contend with disfiguring swelling as well as severe eye pain and agonising headaches. For so small a person her features were large, compounding the impression of oddity and ugliness. At this stage of her life, Maria sounds like the kind of daughter that only a father could love. Not surprisingly almost all her female characters are physically attractive, but the most beautiful are usually lacking morally or intellectually. She strove to make herself lovable by working diligently at Mrs. Latuffiere's curriculum, and later at a similar one, offered by Mrs. Devis at Upper Wimpole Street in London. At both schools she was taught French, at which she became fluent, Italian, drawing, handwriting and dancing. Had this type of education continued, Maria would have become a conventionally accomplished, though unconventionally ugly, upper middle-class young lady. None of her experiences of formal schooling can have endeared this method of education to her.

Three crucial events prevented Maria Edgeworth becoming an ordinary lady, and radically changed Maria's life. In 1780 Honora Edgeworth died and her widower, with by now characteristic haste, following Honora's dying wish, married her sister Elizabeth, flying in the face of convention, if not the law. Although the marriage became happy it began for Edgeworth as a matter of duty. Also, it never absorbed his attention and affection in the devouring way that his marriage to Honora had. In Richard Edgeworth's third marriage there was room for Maria. By comparing this marriage to the previous one she must have come to the conclusion that,

in domestic terms, the marriage which is not first and foremost a love-match is preferable. It allows the family to develop properly as a social entity instead of being an all-absorbing duet. This kind of marriage is described, but, to make a point, is not allowed to flourish, in "Vivian". A year after his third marriage Maria was to need her father's attention even more desperately than usual. In 1781 her eye disease returned so violently that it threatened her sight. She was forbidden to read or write, or indeed, to do anything which might strain what was left of her vision. The emergency seems to have prompted Edgeworth's paternal feelings, and this year marked the beginning of the close relationship between father and daughter so vital to both of them. Fortunately, Maria's sight was not permanently affected. Only the transformation of the relationship with her father lasted. The final key event in Maria Edgeworth's life at this time was her father's decision to return to his Irish estates. He had decided to give up being an absentee landlord. The sound marriage, first based on duty, in which love later developed, and which freed Richard Edgeworth to fulfil his parental responsibilities and enabled him to become a responsible landlord, was to become the model for Maria Edgeworth's portraits of, and teachings about, good marriages in Tales of Fashionable Life. So, the family left England to settle at Edgeworthstown.

Although Maria had disliked the place intensely as a small child, and had been unhappy to the point of welcoming death - to say contemplating suicide is too dramatic - during a relatively brief stay, this time she went gladly. She would live the type of domestic life she had already come to like, and which she was to prefer for the rest of her days; and

she was to be in her father's company far more often than before. Indeed, from this time on, he and his wife Elizabeth were to be wholly responsible for her education. She continued to be as rewarding a pupil at home as at school, with a vastly expanded array of subjects to master. Besides, her father found in her not only a congenial pupil, but one who profited by comparison with her older brother, Richard, and her younger sister, Emmeline. Richard's education on Rousseau's principles had been a catastrophe. He became wilful, unbiddable and unteachable. It is possible that this failure alone, so close to home, may have prompted Edgeworth's enthusiasm for education focused on an identifiable end, practical or professional, instead of Rousseau's larger conception of education for Life; the former type of education Maria Edgeworth too was to consider ideal. At the other end of the scale was Emmeline, docile but dull, and shortly to take every opportunity to leave Ireland for the fashionable pleasures available only whilst visiting friends and relatives in England. In between was Maria, eager and able to learn beyond the conventional, ladylike curriculum, and content to be at home in Ireland.

Exact details of her education are not available, but a great deal can be inferred from her writing, private and published, and from her expert handling of the Edgeworthstown estate during her father's still frequent absences, and after his death. She acted as the agent for Edgeworthstown unofficially, and then officially, until she was seventy-one. Without the least impropriety it may be suggested that Maria Edgeworth's relationship with her father had in it elements of the perfect marriage, by her definition, though as a dutiful daughter she would disclaim this. But she assisted her father in his professional

life as a wife should; she helped raise and educate his younger children; she provided intellectual stimulus and emotional support. If she was accomplished in a feminine sense, she also, from her letters, stories, and purely educational writings, knew something of science, especially botany, zoology and chemistry, mathematics and estate management. She read widely, literature of all sorts in at least three languages, some fiction which she scarcely considered literature and some rather better, and various periodicals dealing both with literature and current affairs.

Being in Ireland may have meant that she was not involved in the day-to-day happenings of a volatile world from within, but she was constantly aware of them in an active, intelligent and discriminating way within a short time of their happening. One should not overlook the importance of the postal system. It was able to deliver not only regular letters to Ireland, but periodicals within the month of their appearance so that Maria could comment on their contents in letters to friends or relatives also within the same month, or very shortly thereafter.[2] (Benjamin Franklin's successful corresponding membership in the Lunar Society indicates how much could be accomplished at a distance, in writing.) In fact, being in Ireland may actually have allowed Maria Edgeworth to be a more acute observer of events than if she had been in the thick of things. There was much to observe. The French Revolution, which figures largely in the Tales of Fashionable Life, began when Maria Edgeworth was twenty-one. In England, both before the French Revolution and after it, there was a series of riots and upheavals which would make an intelligent and thoughtful member of the land-owning gentry like Maria Edgeworth acutely aware of the possible effects of irresponsible land-

lordly action. Food riots were fairly common in England during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth. The Gordon Riots in London in 1780 were extremely destructive of property, and with their roots in anti-Catholicism, must have been particularly distressing to Protestant Irish landowners like the Edgeworths. Not only must they have feared similar religious disturbances in Ireland, but such riots were offensive to them as people religiously tolerant both by education and nature. The Luddites had begun their activities before the second series of the Tales of Fashionable Life was published. Though this phenomenon was unlikely to be duplicated in largely rural Ireland, the spectacle of any subordinate group of people acting violently against a master must have provoked a sense of insecurity and, in an intelligent member of another master group, suggested the need for peaceful preventive measures rather than violent counteraction. Another unnerving point was that, in its social structure, with its peasants and landed gentry, its odd taxes and still-feudal customs, Ireland was more like pre-revolutionary France than constitutionally-governed England. In mitigation, however, landlords like the Edgeworths in Ireland were closer to the realities of peasant life than their French counterparts, and hence less likely to be taken by surprise. The Industrial Revolution was beginning to take hold in England, and with it was coming the formation of working men's organisations and the rise of the working class.[3] To come, during Maria Edgeworth's early years in Ireland, were the wars with France. None of these events made any real impact on Jane Austen's novels nor do they figure largely in Amelia Opie's writings, and yet the Tales of Fashionable Life may be said to be shaped, in part, by most of them. In life, and in her fiction, Maria Edgeworth was socially conscious. The immediacy of

of her awareness led her to work not so much as a large-scale moralist, but rather as a practically improving realist.

In Ireland, Maria Edgeworth lived and dealt daily with a class of people not her own, and who were not her servants. She was intensely aware of the different social orders as part of society as a whole. This is evident in the Tales of Fashionable Life which cover, collectively, a large part of the social spectrum. Her father had impressed on her the importance of fair-dealing not simply with one's peers, but with one's inferiors. One had to be a trustworthy landlord in order to have trustworthy tenants. Maria Edgeworth's Irish world was, in some senses, a more integrated one than that of either middle- or upper-class England or revolutionary France, and one with more facets. Because of this she was able to see a variety of social needs and potential problems at first hand, and to understand the possibility of such problems existing elsewhere, though they might be less apparent to English or French people in her social position. Maria Edgeworth also had a capacity for disinterested action which was largely the result of her father's, and consequently her own, rational and rationalist upbringing. This disinterestedness is perhaps best exemplified by the attitude to religion which prevailed at Edgeworthstown. Edgeworth was determined that the Catholic peasants should be treated justly by Protestant justices and landlords like himself, something which was regarded as odd by many of his co-religionists. Also, when a school was established at Edgeworthstown, appropriate religious instruction was provided for Protestants and Catholics alike, without the least suggestion that either version of faith was inferior or superior, or that the peaceful co-existence of the two systems was

anything but natural. Political and religious disinterestedness was not the order of the day in the latter part of the eighteenth century or the early part of the nineteenth. Being partisan was to be expected, if one was to be at all active politically or socially. Hence, writers like Paine, Burke, Wollstonecraft and Godwin, organisers like Francis Place and religious groups like the Methodists, usually wrote or acted with a deliberate intent to effect change or convert. Commitment and group action rather than informed, intelligent but dispassionate individual thought characterised a good deal of the intellectual and political activity of the time.

By nature, education and geographical location Maria Edgeworth was removed from the social and political maelstrom of England and Western Europe at this time. But simply because she was outside it, she was able to observe the swirlings more clearly and see patterns and tendencies in a way that someone caught in the whirlpool could not, being too close, too engulfed. Equally though, it is impossible to consider Maria Edgeworth unaware of, or even far removed from, historic events. Her brother Lovell was held prisoner in France for a decade as a result of the outbreak of wars between England and France. She herself left France only shortly before the outbreak of war, having spent several months there, in the company of some of the most important post-revolutionary writers and thinkers, and having held her own in conversation. Her oldest brother had married a Methodist, giving her some first-hand experience of this religious phenomenon disapproved by the Edgeworths, but tolerated.

Maria Edgeworth loved domestic life. She was happiest in the company of her father, her half-brothers and sisters and her stepmothers. Elizabeth had died in 1797, and was succeeded by Frances Beaufort in 1798, six months later. Frances was approximately her eldest stepdaughter's contemporary and they developed a warm and mutually valuable relationship. However, Maria Edgeworth never forgot that the slightly younger Frances was owed filial duty. Probably fortunately, Maria Edgeworth seems to have enjoyed chaperoning and teaching her younger siblings, sixteen of whom survived infancy. She and they went into the fashionable world on occasion, and enjoyed themselves, but Maria Edgeworth was always happy to return to Ireland and home. At home she saw examples of what appear, in her writings, to be ideal women - her two last stepmothers. Both were devoted wives and mothers. Both were highly intelligent and well-educated women with talents beyond the ordinary for educating their children. They were quite beautiful. They were humane and friendly towards Maria Edgeworth in a way that her first stepmother had never been. Above all, they subordinated themselves to the needs of their husband and children without seeming demeaned or suppressed, exhibiting instead a special kind of feminine strength of mind and character. Had the wife of the hero of "Vivian", Sarah, lived, one assumes she would have been just such a woman.

The relationships between Richard Edgeworth and his wives, and between him and his eldest daughter may explain something of an anomaly in Tales of Fashionable Life. The anomaly exists for the twentieth century reader, not, apparently, for Maria Edgeworth. Edgeworth was frequently absent from home, yet both his daughter and his wives seem

constantly to have been conscious of his dominating presence, so totally were their lives geared to his support. They were at the centre of well-ordered domestic life, but he was continuously central to their lives.

In Tales of Fashionable Life domestic life is lauded and invariably centres on a woman. There are also many more consequential female characters than male ones. Yet only in "Almeria" is a female character central to the Tale; both character and Tale are very undomestic. Even in "Madame de Fleury" and, to some extent, "Emilie de Coulanges", a physically absent man provides motivating force. In the former it is the imprisoned Monsieur de Fleury, in the latter a mysterious figure who appears at the last and who proves to be Mrs. Somers' son. He occupied Emilie's thoughts a good deal of the time, even though she had only seen him briefly before leaving France, and could not identify him. Maria Edgeworth's "good" women respond to the actions or needs of men even when they are not corporeally present. Women are certainly necessary to the well-being of men, and this gives them a certain power. Unquestionably they are allowed to take responsible action in the domestic sphere. But "good" women have no obvious part in the public domain. Their role is to support public and private male personae. A man's presence impinges much more directly on domestic life, he plays a demanding, rather than a supportive, part. He is central to his own life and to the lives of the women in his family. Apparently, for Maria Edgeworth, only a woman who denies her domestic responsibilities can occupy a truly central place either in life or in fiction.

Education was always one of the key elements in Maria Edgeworth's life, both domestic and public. Her eldest brother was an obvious, though loved, example of a failed educational experiment.. By contrast her father became a fine example of the combined effect of professional education, native intelligence and supportive marriages. He had not only become a good landlord and taught his daughter similar skills, he had made her a thoroughly educated and articulate woman. One can see his partial portrait in the reformed Lords Glenthorn and Clonbrony. Throughout most of Maria Edgeworth's life there was usually someone young enough to be educated in the house, and there was always a school. All her parents, with the exception of her short-lived natural mother, were deeply interested in educational theories and techniques. And she herself, before writing Tales of Fashionable Life was an educational theorist in her own right. Letters for Literary Ladies published in 1795 offered her first public ideas on the possibilities of female education, suggesting a far broader curriculum than that offered by mesdames Latuffiere and Devis. Practical Education, written jointly by Maria Edgeworth and her father, was published in 1798 and dealt with the education of children, male and female. Essays on Professional Education was published in 1809, the same year as the first group of Tales of Fashionable Life, bearing only Richard Edgeworth's name. However, much of the background work, and the writing, was done by his daughter. Professional Education is concerned exclusively with male education for the professions, including that of landed gentlemen. Both by experience and her own education Maria Edgeworth understood that there was also a vital need for women to be educated for the female profession - domesticity. This was not an inferior occupation, but one that needed its practitioners to be as

carefully prepared as the practitioners of the male professions. In order intelligently to support a husband, father or son, and in order to produce equally well-qualified daughters, a woman must be as well-educated as a man, but with a different focus. The task of the woman was to promote domestic harmony, and by extension, social harmony; to stimulate young minds; to understand the importance of the part the male members of her family played in society, and to sustain them in this role. Her role was in the private domain: to create an environment suitable for the growth and maintenance of responsible men who would operate in the public sphere. Given the importance of the woman's role, women were just as much in need of guidance about their professional education as men.

As chapter two will show, Maria Edgeworth read widely, and she understood the power of fiction, frequently for ill, potentially for good. She knew how popular a story was, and she had grasped that a well-written tale, interestingly told, could capture an audience as successfully as could a trashy novel. An aunt's delight in the Tales prior to their publication helped prove this. However, Maria Edgeworth had other reasons, besides wanting to reach the widest possible audience, for choosing a form of fiction, the tale, as her educational vehicle. Her message would be free of any taint that might attach to its being conveyed in a conventional novel. For, as will appear in chapter two, novels were held in low esteem by many "right-thinking" people at this period. The word "novel" implied the adjectives "time-wasting" at best, "corrupting" at worst. Her medium and her message would be in harmony, and she could rail against the reading of frivolous novels whilst continuing to write fiction. For her message to women could not be conveyed in the same

form as the essays on practical and professional education. The essays dealt with matters largely in the public domain. The conduct of domestic life was a private matter and its realities could not, as far as Maria Edgeworth was concerned, be discussed publicly. Fiction lent propriety to the public examination of a properly conducted private life. Distancing by fictionalising also allowed her to draw on a wealth of personal as well as practical experience and observation without making the events of her domestic life public. Writing fiction enabled her to exercise her long-developed capacity for recounting domestic activities and her conversational talents. At a more practical level fiction gave her a rest from the carefully researched texts that had occupied her for several years. Finally, it allowed her to show a special kind of independence. Fiction was her medium, not her father's. Castle Rackrent had already made her name as a writer of fiction, and had informed a large public as well as entertained it. She could use fiction again with the same didactic purpose, in Tales of Fashionable Life, drawing on her experience as a reader, as well as a writer.

CHAPTER II

Literary Influences and Mentors: Maria Edgeworth's Choice of the Moral Tale for her Textbook

Maria Edgeworth was a literate and literary lady. Her published writing and her letters reveal that she read extensively in a wide variety of subjects; frequently her choice was non-fiction.[1] A significant number of the titles she mentions reflect her early interest, inspired by her father, in science and technology. The titles also suggest background reading for the two educational texts written in partnership with her father - Darwin's Botanic Garden and Zoonomia; Shaw's Zoology; Chemie (sic) de la goût et de l'odorat; the six-volume Machines approuvés and Wilkin's Real Character, or an Essay Towards a Universal Philosophical Language. Her letters indicate that she read children's books with her young brothers and sisters. Evenings at Home and many books by Madame de Genlis are mentioned. More importantly, she describes using Robinson's Proofs of Conspiracy to find out about the nature of illuminatism, the subject of a play written and performed by the young Edgeworths. This is an excellent example of the happy coincidence of being educated and having fun. Maria Edgeworth questioned the factual accuracy of Robinson's text. Much of her reading seems to have been prompted by practical circumstances or an immediate need for information. Lord Selkirk's Essay on Immigration would naturally interest an Irish landowner. When she visited France she read Voyages dans les Pays Bas de M. de Breton because it was of direct relevance to what she was doing. To keep up with current political and literary events Maria Edgeworth apparently regularly read at least the Monthly Review and the Star and, while in France, the Journal des débats. She read for pleasure as

well , some of her choices combining fact-gathering with recreation: Carleton's Memoirs, Hawkins's Life of Johnson, Gay's Trivia. She also read the work of several poets. Pope, Byron, whose English Bards and Scotch Reviewers she regarded with contempt, and Walter Scott whose Lady of the Lake, Lay of the Last Minstrel and Marmion delighted her. Briefly, this list indicates some of Maria Edgeworth's tastes and her motives for reading. It is obvious from her tales and longer fiction, replete with quotations and literary allusions, and from references in her educational texts, that her range was very wide indeed. It is equally obvious that she was fully aware that instruction and entertainment could go comfortably hand in hand.

Interesting though Maria Edgeworth's preferences in non-fiction, poetry and drama are, of greater moment both in terms of her approach to Tales of Fashionable Life and her impact on literary history, is her response to fiction. Judging fiction was, for Maria Edgeworth, a moral as well as an aesthetic and literary undertaking. In 1783 she replied to her old schoolfriend Fanny Robinson's recommendation to read a novel thus:

> You desire me to read Julia de Roubigni (sic) if I should meet it. I won't promise you that I will, for though I am fond of novels as you can be I am afraid they act upon the constitution of the mind as Drams on the body - But your recommendation will induce me to read any other species of books.[2]

To consider novel-reading addictive and possibly mind-numbing was by no means uncommon, and Henry Mackenzie's Julia de Roubigné is a good example of a kind of novel that Maria Edgeworth particularly deplored. It is a novel of feeling, of sentiment, of romantic love. Julia is the magnificently beautiful daughter of a noble couple living in reduced circumstances.

She reveals no intellectual qualities and emotionally is capable only of extremes. In a series of letters to her friend Maria de Roncilles she recounts her mother's tragic death and her own loveless marriage to the rich Montauban in order to recoup her family's fortunes. Her true love, Savillon, who had temporarily vanished from her life, returns shortly after her marriage. She writes to him and visits him briefly and innocently. Her husband discovers both letters and the meeting and is convinced of her infidelity. He agonises over this in a series of letters to his confidant. In a fit of jealous rage he poisons Julia. Then, realising his error, he goes mad and kills himself. The language of the novel is high-flown, the mood frequently ecstatic both in joy and anguish, characters laying their souls poetically and dramatically bare. On several counts this must have been repugnant to Maria Edgeworth. In the first place the violent and desperate acts of the novel must have seemed to her dangerously exaggerated. Shakespeare may have used similar plots, but he was a dramatist, he was allowed greater licence. Maria Edgeworth seems to have felt that novel-readers could not so easily distinguish fact from fiction as could play-goers. They were, therefore, more likely to be influenced by fiction in their own conduct. Accordingly, to represent, in fascinating and exciting language, morally reprehensible acts such as suicide and murder was itself morally reprehensible. Equally, Maria Edgeworth must have been offended by the public baring of souls, not only to the reader, but within the novel. Julia and Montauban express their passionate feelings not to each other in private, but in the semi-public medium of letters to friends. This is wholly improper behaviour in Edgeworthian terms. Finally, romantic love, rather than sensible marriage, is glorified. Had Maria Edgeworth written Julia de

Roubigné the married couple would probably have learned to respect and love each other, Savillon would have been forgotten, and the Roubigné fortunes would have been restored so that Julia's father could live out a peaceful old age.

Julia de Roubigné has elements of the gothic novel. But Maria Edgeworth evidently found truly gothic novels much less dangerous. She treated them in her letters, and in her own fiction, with faint, amused disdain. The hero of "Ennui", Lord Glenthorn makes an ironic reference to Mrs. Radcliffe.[3] Maria Edgeworth implies that this type of fiction is the entertainment of the idle, and the habitually, if not practically, illiterate. Writing, in 1792, to Sophy Ruxton, the aunt who so enjoyed her Tales, she describes her reaction to two gothic romances.

> Has my aunt seen The Romance of the Forest? It has been the fashionable novel here, everybody read and talked of it. It is something in the style of the Castle of Otranto, and the horrible parts are we thought well worked up, but it is very difficult to keep horror breathless with his mouth wide open through three volumes.[4]

The older Maria Edgeworth has apparently lost some of her censorious opposition to novels. Probably the content of most gothic novels was so far removed from any description of proper domestic life that its potentially dangerous influence on real-life action was diminished. Most gothic and romantic novels conclude with a marriage, which is assumed to continue romantically and happily ever after. They are, in a sense, the "purest" form of fiction, owing little to reality. Only foolish people like Jane Austen's Catherine Morland would react with credulity, and a sound education would remedy that. If Maria Edgeworth's own response quoted here is a guide, she also felt that many readers had a natural capability to resist the sustained impact of romantic

fiction, or that the writers had difficulty in sustaining the suspense adequately, thereby providing in-built relief, and allowing a sense of reality to break through. By contrast, Henry Mackenzie and his ilk are dangerous because they combine a version of the domestic with the romantic. Julia's marriage takes place approximately in the middle of the novel, and is then pulled, twisted and dishonored by romantic manipulations. It is degraded and ends in double disaster.

If Maria Edgeworth's reaction to Julia de Roubigné is clearly stated, her response to Madame de Staël's fiction is much more complex. She read Corinne after she had completed the laborious groundwork for Professional Education in 1808, the year after the novel's publication. It "both fascinated and disappointed her."[5] Already she had found Delphine wanting, "'tiresome and immoral or as a gentleman lately said il manque d'être abrégé - éclairci et épuré'."[6] Nevertheless, Maria Edgeworth was fully aware than Madame de Staël was a gifted and sometimes brilliant writer, though her conclusions must have irked Maria Edgeworth as much as her loquacity.

Corinne is the tale of Oswald, Lord Nevil's romantic journey to Italy to try to recover his health and spirits, broken mainly by the death of his father. In a Rome vibrating with life, excitement and colour he first sees Corinne in a pageant, representing the spirit of Italy. He loves her, but is betrothed to Lucile, a much more modest, unexciting Englishwoman. Remarkably, Corinne proves to be both English and Lucile's sister. After many vicissitudes Oswald dutifully marries Lucile and Corinne dies. With her dies all possibility of passionate, heartfelt

happiness. He remains an absolutely faithful and exemplary husband, but a spiritless one.

> Lord Nevil donne l'exemple de la vie domestique la plus regulière et la plus pure. Mais se pardonne-t-il de sa conduite passée? le monde, qui l'approuva, le consola-t-il? se contenta-t-il d'un sort commun après ce qu'il avait perdu? Je l'ignore; je ne veux à cet égard ni le blâmer ni l'absoudre.[7]

"Le sort commun" is precisely what Maria Edgeworth approves: ordinary, well-regulated, properly conducted life. To hanker after romantic alternatives is reprehensible and Mme. de Staël, because of her influential talent, is to be reproved for allowing and glorifying doubt. That her literary skills should be turned to depicting romantic discontent and not condemning it, is reprehensible. It tends to lead weak minds astray much more dangerously than the far-fetched tales of the purely gothic novelists. It is the "Dram-effect" that disquieted Maria Edgeworth in 1783, a drugging of the moral sense. The habit-forming aspect of novels also tends to interfere with the reader's capacity to work and study, both of which were vital parts of the everyday life of the properly domestic woman as conceived by Maria Edgeworth.

There is no evidence that Maria Edgeworth read the Irish Sydney Owenson's The Wild Irish Girl, but it was written in 1806 whilst Maria Edgeworth was working on the Tales of Fashionable Life, and it warrants consideration because it was so popular that she cannot have been ignorant of its existence, even if not familiar with its content. It contains a major female character, Glorvina, and it exemplifies a type of fiction which must, on several counts, have been anathema to Maria Edgeworth.

Horatio M., a reluctant law student is "banished" to Ireland by his father who hopes that, removed from the attractions of English society, he will work. In another version of the epistolatory novel Horatio recounts how his father's hopes are disappointed. Appended to the letters are numerous footnotes which give documentary details about Irish customs, history, language, myths and legends, and lend a false air of verisimilitude to an account of Irish life which could hardly be farther from the realism of Castle Rackrent, "Ennui" and "The Absentee".

For Horatio, Ireland is a mysterious, enchanted and exotic country peopled by charming and picturesque peasants and a plethora of princes, one of whom is the father of the glorious Glorvina, the "wild Irish girl" by whom the injured Horatio, travelling romantically and pseudonymously as Henry Mortimer, is tended. In breathless and overwrought prose, ending in bathos, Mortimer describes his recovery of consciousness and his vision of Glorvina:

> I feigned the stillness of death - yet the curtain remained unclosed - many minutes elapsed - I ventured to unseal my eyes, and met the soul dissolving glance of my sweet attendant spirit, who seemed to gaze intently on her charge. Emotion on my part the most delicious, on hers the most modestly confused, for the moment prevented all presence of mind; the beautiful arm still supported the curtain - my ardent gaze was still rivetted on a face alternately suffused with the electric flashes of red and white. At last the curtain fell, the priest entered, and the vision, the sweetest, brightest, vision of my life, dissolved!
>
> Glorvina sprung towards her tutor, and told him aloud, that the nurse had entreated her to take her place while she descended to dinner.[8]

An idyll ensues, brought to an end by Henry/Horatio's return to England, a series of potential marital entanglements and the death of Glorvina's father. All this allows Sydney Owenson to conclude the novel with a

heavily symbolic and rambling plea for England and Ireland to live in peace and prosperity.

It is hard to believe that Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth are writing about the same country. And though both women demonstrate a concern for Ireland, Maria Edgeworth promotes practical action, Sydney Owenson emotes. Glorvina, as depicted, could not possibly contribute anything to domestic life and social amelioration. She is a useless literary ornament. In spite of the apostrophising end her creator had no realistically improving purpose.

Maria Edgeworth was not wholly opposed to novels, but they had to be more than impassioned romances. They had to be morally, spiritually or practically improving and enlightening, as well as, secondarily, being entertaining. Her taste is probably indicated in this scrap of conversation between Godfrey Percy and Maria Hauton in Patronage which she published in 1814.

> Godfrey, who had kept aloof, had in the meantime been looking at some books that lay on the reading table. -- Maria Hauton was written on the first page of several of them. -- All were novels -- some French and some German, of a sort which he did not like. "What have you there, Mr. Percy?" said Miss Hauton. -- "Nothing worth your notice, I am afraid, I daresay you do not like novels."
>
> "Pardon me, I like some novels very much."
>
> "Which?" said Miss Hauton, rising and approaching the table.
>
> "All that are just representations of life and manners, or of the human heart," said Godfrey, "provided they are --"
>
> "Ah! the human heart!" interrupted Miss Hauton: "the heart can only understand the heart -- who, in modern times, can describe the human heart?"
>
> "Not to speak of foreigners -- Miss Burney -- Mrs. Inchbald -- Mrs. Opie," said Godfrey.[9]

If Godfrey's taste is Maria Edgeworth's, one should examine work by the writers he approved to discover what it is that is admirable.

A short account of Evelina's education is sufficient to show why Maria Edgeworth admired her story, why its improving message can be detected in her own fiction, and why Maria Edgeworth thoroughly approved of Fanny Burney. Evelina is an epistolatory novel describing the moral and social education and development of Evelina Anville, Fanny Burney's heroine. Lively and amusing, though invariably instructive, Evelina is filled with the conventional fictitious twists and turns of fate and fortune. Evelina is the unacknowledged daughter of Sir John Belmont and his disavowed wife Caroline, who died at Evelina's birth. She is brought up by the kindly and morally blameless Reverend Mr. Villars. Her first London season, her introduction to fashionable life, disrupts her moral education, or rather, sets it on a different course. Thanks to regular letters from Mr. Villars she is never without a moral tutor, but she has often made mistakes before he can be of assistance to her. A chance meeting introduces Evelina to her future husband, Lord Orville, who frequently reappears in the course of the novel to guide and rescue Evelina. He remains her true friend despite numerous social disasters. (Edward A. Bloom suggests that Lord Orville and Evelina are precursors of Lord Colambre and Grace Nugent in the "Absentee".[10] Certainly there are similarities. Lords Orville and Colambre are good, intelligent, morally upright men, in the fashionable world but above it, and devotedly protective of their inexperienced female charges. Evelina is a more fully developed character than Grace Nugent, which is only to be expected as she is the focal point of Miss Burney's story, whereas Grace Nugent is only a supporting player.)

Evelina delights in the manifold pleasures of London high society. But when she is reduced, temporarily, to petty bourgeois state by the

sudden appearance of her foreign and vulgar grandmother and becomes involved with the citified but uncivilised Branghtons, London begins to lose its charm. Having met and saved the life of a suicidal Mr. Macartney, she gladly returns to the rural peace of Berry Hill and domestic tranquility in her guardian's company. Her London experiences have weakened her physically, though her moral strength has developed, and she is taken to Bristol by the virtuous but brisk Mrs. Selwyn, Mr. Villars' friend and confidante. At Bristol she rediscovers the foppish, stupid, dangerous and fashionable Lord Merton and Mr. Lovel, men who share a good deal in common with "Ennui's" unredeemed Lord Glenthorn. In a series of upheavals Mr. Macartney is revealed to be Evelina's brother; she is recognised by her now repentent father and both siblings marry: Evelina, Lord Orville and her brother, the erstwhile Belmont heiress, Polly Green, now discovered to have been substituted for Evelina by her nurse, another connection with "Ennui" and its "changed at nurse" hero.

Evelina has entered the world and will, to some extent, remain in it, though guided and supported by an ideal husband, and so ensured a proper domestic life. Although Evelina has moments of drama - highwaymen, attempted suicides, wild bets and a frequently mildly endangered heroine - its story falls more or less into the realm of realistic, if not real, life. Admittedly some of the coincidental happenings stretch credulity, but so do they in Maria Edgeworth's novels, and in life. Certainly Evelina contains no elements of the gothic, the supernatural, the truly horrid. Because of this, and the talent with which Fanny Burney writes, Maria Edgeworth approved.

Above all fiction though, Maria Edgeworth admitted Elizabeth Inchbald's novels, especially A Simple Story. She read it at least four times and its moral, that the want of a proper education for women leads to ruin might have been chosen to appeal to her particularly. Miss Milner, a spectacularly beautiful orphan is made the warden of her father's closest friend, Mr. Dorriforth. She is kind-hearted, but strong-willed and quick-tempered. She is depicted as a grown-up child whose mind is virtually untouched by any rigorous kind of education, and who must be dealt with rather as a spoiled girl than a woman. She has an iron whim and a childishly romantic inability to control her emotions. Her immediate reaction to the attempted imposition of someone else's will is either defiance, or floods of tears, or both. Sorrow provokes further floods of tears, as does compassion. When shocked in the slightest degree, she faints. She loves pretty clothes, masquerades and the company of mostly frivolous friends. In short, she is entirely without intellectual resources. Supporting Mr. Dorriforth in his attempt to honour the dead Mr. Milner's wishes are Miss Woodley, a middle-aged Catholic lady, extremely plain but immensely good-hearted, and the priest Mr. Sandford, Mr. Dorriforth's friend. Dorriforth also has another ward, Henry Rushbrook, whom he refuses to see, but maintains handsomely. Eventually the two are reconciled through Miss Milner's generous impetuosity.

Miss Milner begins by loving the dashing Sir Frederick Lawnly, but eventually falls in love with Mr. Dorriforth, who by now has succeeded to a title and become Lord Elmwood. Miss Milner vows to give up her trivial, expensive and pleasure-seeking way of life and for a few years after she marries Elmwood they live happily and produce a daughter.

Business forces Lord Elmwood to the West Indies for a lengthy visit, prolonged still further by a dangerous illness. Knowing that his wife lacks the strength of mind and character to cope with the knowledge of his ill-health he hides the truth. Unfortunately, Lady Elmwood's vivid and untutored imagination leads her to the certainty that she has lost not only her husband's presence, but his love. She turns for comfort to her old admirer, Sir Frederick Lawnly, now Duke of Avon. On his return to England Lord Elmwood disowns his wife, but does not divorce her, and, after her death undertakes the financial care of his daughter but refuses to see, or be seen, by her. The daughter, Matilda, is punished for her mother's failings. In a sense this is effective, for the faithful, sober and seemingly intelligent Miss Woodley becomes her sole companion and mentor. Lady Matilda's education will be better taken care of than her mother's. She may be better-educated, but she is, if anything, more prone to tears and swoonings than her mother. In extremis, when kidnapped, she can only starve herself and refuse to change her tattered and torn clothes. Like her mother she is revealed by her actions and reactions, rather than by her words, which are usually polite or dutiful formulae until she is provoked to impassioned outbursts which end in a purely physical response. Eventually Lord Elmwood is reconciled to Lady Matilda and, as a fatherly duty, attempts to marry her to Henry Rushbrook whom she does not love, though he loves her. The gentle Miss Woodley acts frequently as a go-between, subduing her own feelings to help Matilda. In the end Lady Matilda fairly reluctantly agrees to marry Rushbrook. It is implied that this reasonable marriage will fare better, and eventually be happier, than the ill-considered Elmwood match. So, the novel ends with a moral lesson, though it is very much a novel of feeling, a sentimental novel.

Amelia Opie's style and intent are similar to Elizabeth Inchbald's, though her medium, frequently the short moral tale, is different. Her choice is of interest in relation to the Tales of Fashionable Life. In a note to the reader Mrs. Opie describes her story The Father and Daughter saying that it is

> wholly devoid of those attempts at strong character, comic situation, bustle, variety of incident which constitute a NOVEL, and that its highest pretensions are to be SIMPLE, MORAL TALE.[11]

Maria Edgeworth chose the same medium but, as will be shown in chapter three, enlarged on Mrs. Opie's conception.

The Father and Daughter is little more than bare moralistic bones, though the opening is arresting, as Agnes Fitzhenry struggles through the snow to her father's house, clutching her illegitimate child. In addition there are stock characters - the kind, gentle and well-intentioned father, a widower, who fails to bring his daughter up properly because he cannot be both mother and father; the beautiful faithless daughter, seduced by a rake, repentant after the birth of her child; a faithful servant who is actually one of the more fully-developed characters, capable of annoyance and petty jealousy as well as generosity; honest cottagers; a true friend; the charming, innocent child and the rake reformed, compose the rest of the main cast of characters.

Agnes Fitzhenry defies her father and leaves home to marry a thoroughly unsuitable man. Not only does he fail to marry her, he marries an heiress instead. He has, however, seduced Agnes, who bears him a son. Discovering her lover's treachery she attempts to return to her father's house. En route she meets an escaped lunatic whom she

eventually realises is her father, driven mad by her defection. She is aided first by cottagers and then by a woman who was once her servant, who now keeps a school. Agnes helps her and does menial work to support herself and her child. She had wanted to work at the lunatic asylum, devoting herself entirely to her father's care. This noble gesture is refused, but her pleas do result in her being allowed to visit him daily. Money from a rich female friend contributes to the family's well-being. However, not everyone is so charitable. Several parents remove their children from the little school lest they be contaminated by the proximity of illegitimate mother and child, and because they doubt the probity of a woman who harbours such people. Agnes removes herself and her child, and is finally able to bring her father home. He is not cured, but is somewhat better, and harmless. On his deathbed he recognises his daughter. Her death follows rapidly. In the final pages the erstwhile rake, now wealthy and titled as a result of his marriages, returns and claims his son.

This is a story with very little description or conversation beyond the minimum necessary to move the story forward. Time passes almost unremarked, the scene is set as briefly as in an Elizabethan drama, a wood, London, a small town. No attempt is made, for example, to record the father's decline in detail. At least in the twentieth-century mind, the characters excite no pity. They are merely ambulant moral precepts or samples of some single aspect of the human condition. In Tales of Fashionable Life Maria Edgeworth often develops both characters and situations much more fully. She uses these not to teach large moral principles nor simply to warn about the evil consequences of wrong-doing.

Rather, she wishes to provide specific instances of correct conduct in clearly identified circumstances, so that her readers may readily practise what she teaches by clear example.

In Amelia Opie's "The Fashionable Wife and the Unfashionable Husband" there is a little more description of people, places and events, but still the overriding impression is of moral characteristics and failings rather than of people. Louisa Howard is another entrancingly lovely motherless daughter. The absence of a mother's guiding hand allows Louisa to develop romantic tendencies, extravagance and a passion for gambling. She falls in love with Lord Henry Algeron because of the splendour of his political speeches, as reported in the journals. Such is her passion that she commits them to memory. In spite of the fact that he proves to be plain and much older than she, they marry. She has already contracted gambling debts. She uses money for her trousseau to pay them, but she is incorrigible. In spite of her husband's good influence, and because of his generosity with money, she continues to gamble. Eventually she is found out. Her appalled husband decides that, for the sake of propriety they will continue to appear in public as a happily married couple, but privately they will no longer live as man and wife. The guilty Louisa concurs but the strain is horrendous. To spare her husband further anguish, and for her father's sake, she attempts to put a brave face on things. Cosmetics conceal the fact that she is deathly pale and her clothes that she grows daily thinner. Finally she can bear her situation no longer and attempts to poison herself with laudanum. Her husband discovers her scheme and prevents it. Tried by fire, the couple is re-united and the married pair becomes a shining example to others. As

in The Father and Daughter, the figures in the story represent characteristics rather than displaying true, and mixed, human qualities and emotions. Louisa has no lively distinguishing features. She is simply the epitome of all well-loved, well-married rich women who are undone by the vices of gambling and dissimulation. Maria Edgeworth is as concerned as Amelia Opie to portray the evils of gambling, weak-mindedness and a fondness for the frivolous, but because of her particular talents, and also to give her Tales more practical force, she often gives her characters more depth. Also, Elizabeth Inchbald and Amelia Opie depict the road to moral ruin, the more practical Maria Edgeworth offers, in common with Fanny Burney, the possibilities of domestic salvation. She seeks actively to educate rather than simply to warn.

Together, Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald and Amelia Opie provide a prototype for Maria Edgeworth's Tales of Fashionable Life, but she modifies it, not to produce something superior in literary terms, but to use the same themes in a way peculiarly suited to her particular didactic purpose. A reviewer commenting on her Tales in the British Review in October, 1812 suggests further reasons why she would choose a form which is an amalgam of the moral tale and the novel with a moral.

> The grave, who are too busy, and the gay, who are too idle, to spare time for the perusal of romance of four volumes, will venture upon a tale comprised in one. Many, who would revolt at the name of a novel, will deem a moral tale worthy of their attention. All who value genuine humour, a lively delineation of the scenes of real life, and a nice discrimination of those more delicate shades of character, which escape common-place writers and observers, will be well inclined to read tales written by one who has so often pleased and instructed us by the display of these talents. From this consideration these volumes assume an importance, which might not at the first view appear to belong to them. Compared with certain ponderous products of the press, they scarcely bear the proportion of a bullet to a battering-ram;

> but, in both cases, if in calculating the effects that are likely to be produced, we take only the weight of metal into account, our conclusions will be erroneous. The comparative degrees of velocity with which the different volumes will pass through the reading societies, or the list of subscriptions to a circulating library, must not be forgotten in the estimate.[12]

Simple publicity was not the whole answer. Maria Edgeworth had an important educational message to deliver to as many readers as possible, though women were her particular audience. She intended her message for all potential readers noted above; but she did not want to waste her reader's time so she chose the tale rather than the full-blown novel for this reason as well. Almost all of Maria Edgeworth's fiction is fairly short. It is also seldom discursive. Her characters, whether fully-developed or not, are well-defined, and the action is memorable if not exciting. Such features render her fiction readable in fits and starts, a chapter here, a short story there, without losing the thread. This is a style of reading compatible with an active and productive domestic life of the sort Maria Edgeworth admired. Here is reading for recreation in the spare moments allowed by the demands of real life, and also the stuff of education. By contrast, novels such as Corinne are so extraordinarily desultory, complicated and crammed with discontinuous action and elaborate descriptions, or like The Wild Irish Girl so bereft of any real plot or characterisation, that they demand close attention for long periods of time if they are to make sense. As they have little or nothing instructive to offer, such fictional styles imply, to Maria Edgeworth, large amounts of wasted time.

Maria Edgeworth did more in Tales of Fashionable Life than refine the moral tale as described by Amelia Opie. She enlivened it by adding

to it often vivacious conversation such as one might expect in real life. Many of her characters are witty, clever and thoughtful. Those who are boring, platitudinous or trivial are deliberately so, and are made interesting to the reader, though not admirable, by her careful delineation of their speech and actions. Many of her major, and some of her minor, characters do not need the simple labelling which frequently passes for character in the old-style moral tale. In their speech they identify themselves quite subtly, and they are fleshed out by, and in conversation with, their fellow characters. They have a life, a vigour which, of the characters examined here, only Evelina possesses. And Fanny Burney had three volumes in which to develop her character. As will be seen, Maria Edgeworth can do this with "Ennui's" Lady Geraldine in a few pages, siimilarly with Lady Sarah in "Vivian". Her Irish characters, especially the peasants, are vividly drawn. Their speech is realistic and, even more importantly, they are shown sympathetically, though not indulgently, in their natural setting. In Tales of Fashionable Life Maria Edgeworth depicts a variety of Irish women both at home and abroad.

Conversations are crucial to the development of story and character in "Ennui", "Vivian", "Manoeuvring", "Emilie de Coulanges" and "The Absentee", and the vitality and realism of language and speech is a quite new, if not unique, development in English fiction at this time. This development was not acceptable to all Maria Edgeworth's critics. A review of the first series of Tales in the Universal Magazine in 1809 castigates her roundly:

> Whoever is acquainted with the writings of Miss Edgeworth, knows that they are distinguished by a great display of good sense and a small display of good language. When we say this, we mean that her diction, except when it is

> dramatic, (and then it is in general very appropriate) is disfigured by barbarisms and colloquial meanness. -- Words, which are merely the cant of fashion, are used as strictly legitimate, and phrases which are barely allowable in a literary chit-chat over a cup of tea, are familiarised to the reader by their too frequent use. This negligence of language, this slovenly dress in which she chooses to invest her offspring, is to be reprehended, for it adds nothing either in perspicuity or force to the plain, common sense, by which she aims to please and instruct. She endeavours to become familiar, but she is mean.[13]

This "refined" reaction is unreasonable, and the reviewer first demonstrates his own antiquated attitudes and then makes manifest the progressiveness, social and literary, which shows Maria Edgeworth to be truly in tune with her times, and perhaps a step ahead. But then the same reviewer was convinced that "In 'The Dun', there is a scene described at p. 334, which we should deem wholly unfit for a female pen".[14] He goes on to give examples of supposed grammatical and stylistic errors. Happily, the reviewer for the Lady's Monthly Museum, dealing with the same volumes in the same year thought differently.

> In this collection of interesting Tales, Miss Edgeworth has given a most favourable specimen of her talents: they display an extensive knowledge of human nature, in all its shades and varieties; the language is uniformly correct and easy, without the smallest tincture of pedantic affectation.[15]

Several critics, whilst admiring her literary capabilities, condemned her work as godless because she did not deal explicitly with religion, and it was believed that she therefore suggested that it was inessential to virtuous life. It seems more likely that Maria Edgeworth simply believed religion to be a private matter and not a fit subject for fiction. In any case she had already declared what part literature should play in the education of women. She went on to produce a type of fiction which met her criteria, thereby rather spiking potential critics' guns.

> With respect to the literary education of the female sex, the arguments on both sides of the question have already been stated, with all the impartiality in our power, in another place; without obtruding a detail of the same arguments again upon the public, it will be sufficient to profess the distinct opinion, which a longer consideration of the subject has yet more fully confirmed. That it will tend to the happiness of society in general, that women should have their understandings cultivated and enlarged as much as possible; that the happiness of domestic life, the virtues and the powers of pleasing in the female sex, the yet more desirable power of attaching those worthy of their love and esteem, will be increased by the judicious cultivation of the female understanding, more than by all that modern gallantry or ancient chivalry could devise in favour of the sex. Much prudence and ability are requisite to conduct properly a young woman's literary education. Her imagination must not be raised above the taste for necessary occupations, or the numerous small, but not trifling pleasures of domestic life: her mind must be enlarged, yet the delicacy of her manners must be preserved: her knowledge must be various, and her powers of reasoning unawed by authority; yet she must habitually feel that nice sense of propriety, which is at once the guard and the charm of every feminine virtue. By early caution, unremitting, scrupulous caution in the choice of the books which are put into the hands of girls, a mother or a preceptress may fully occupy and entertain their pupils, and excite in their minds a taste for propriety, as well as a taste for literature. It cannot be necessary to add more than this general idea, that a mother ought to be answerable to her daughter's husband for the books her daughter reads, as well as for the company she keeps.[16]

In Tales of Fashionable Life Maria Edgeworth is using fiction for a specific rather than a general educational purpose. She is teaching women to practise their domestic profession. Therefore, though she entertains her readers, she also reminds them by a series of quietly mocking references to various popular forms and plots of fiction throughout the Tales, that her fiction is not romantic trash nor gothic escapism. In "Vivian":

> Novelists and novel readers are usually satisfied when they arrive at this happy catastrophe; (marriage) their interests and curiosity seldom go any further: but in real life marriage is but the beginning of domestic happiness or misery.[17]

> She objected to Miss Bateman, as being of the class of literary women; to her real faults, her inordinate love of admiration, of romantic imprudence, lady Glistonbury did not object, because she did not at first know them.... "All those clever women, as they are called, are the same. This comes of literature and literary ladies." (p. 151)

In "Manoeuvring":

> "And really, my lord, it grieves me much to spoil the romance, to destroy the effect of a tale, which might in the future serve for the foundation for some novel, over which the belles and beaux, yet unborn, might weep and wonder...."[18]

And in "Ennui":

> If, among those who may be tempted to peruse my history, there should be any mere novel readers, let me advise them to throw the book aside at the commencement of this chapter; for I have no more sudden turns of fortune. (p. 265)

Maria Edgeworth, with Tales of Fashionable Life, tried to produce fiction very different from that deadly, stupefying dram, the novel. She offers a fictional version of a bracing cup of tea. Her Tales are not simply intellectually invigorating, they are designed to promote practical action every bit as much as the essays describing education for the male professions. Her Tales were to teach women how to be excellent wives, mothers and daughters. They were to help her readers by positive examples of intelligent domesticity, and conversely, to assist them in avoiding the traps, into which her "bad" characters fell. They were intended to dissuade women from entering the public arena even if they had the appropriate talents. (She herself sometimes published anonymously or allowed her father to take entire credit for joint work. He also wrote prefaces to her work, which suggested that she was in need of male sponsorship and also lent an air of maidenly propriety.) Talents could be put to good use in a domestic setting teaching children,

quietly entertaining friends or, like her artistic stepmother Frances Beaufort, one would illustrate one's husband's books. The Tales also make it clear though, that a woman should be aware of important political, social and cultural events so that she would be a fit companion and help-meet for a husband, a guide for a son, who would lead professional lives.

CHAPTER III

Women and the Domestic Profession in *Tales of Fashionable Life*

There are eight *Tales of Fashionable Life*, "Ennui", "Almeria", "Madame de Fleury", "The Dun" and "Manoeuvring", published in 1809, followed by "Vivian", "Emilie de Coulanges" and "The Absentee" in 1812.

"Ennui" is the first of the *Tales of Fashionable Life*. To begin with, it is the story of the bored and therefore dissolute Lord Glenthorn, and his life of empty pleasure. Glenthorn is cheated by his servants, his wife, his agents. Only his old wet-nurse, Ellinor Donoghoe, is consistently his faithful supporter. Glenthorn's way of living ruins him, and he is obliged to learn to be a lawyer to earn his bread. He becomes a soberer character. Travelling to Ireland to oversee his neglected estates he meets and becomes enamoured of the intelligent and delightful Lady Geraldine. But she marries another man and leaves Ireland for India. In a dramatic series of *dénouements* Glenthorn is revealed to be the child of his nurse, Ellinor, and her supposed son to be the true Lord Glenthorn. The real Lord, uneducated for the position, cannot continue the restorative work done by Ellinor's son. Fortunately the erstwhile Lord Glenthorn is able to earn his living as a lawyer. A fire reduces Glenthorn Castle to ashes and completely demoralises the real Lord Glenthorn, who begs his foster-brother to resume the title. This, fortunately, he can do in all honesty, having married Cecilia Delamere, heir-at-law to the Glenthorn estates.

The first female character to make an appearance is Ellinor Donoghoe,

an old Irish woman. Some of her characteristics might seem to be stage Irish -- she is slovenly and lazy as far as her living arrangements are concerned, preferring to exist in a sod-roofed shack, rather than a slate roofed cottage; burning the interior peat walls and pieces of furniture, because this is more convenient. But her speech is a realistic attempt to represent an Irish accent, and she had a many-sided character. She can be kind, angry, lazy, industrious, loving, sulky and generous. In short, she is presented as a whole person, neither totally perfect nor totally imperfect. When she dies, having revealed that she is really Lord Glenthorn's mother, and that the man she brought up as her son is the true Lord, one sees the death, not of a romantic old Irish woman, of no human, merely fictional consequence. As her real son said - "I lost in her the only human being who had ever shown me warm, disinterested affection" (p. 239). Ellinor may not be the perfect role model for Maria Edgeworth's upper-crust female readers, but she does serve the educational purpose of exemplifying a number of qualities desirable in all worthy human beings. Her presence also serves to remind such readers that virtue and honesty are not the exclusive property of people of their own class. Maria Edgeworth is teaching that one's inferiors are entitled to respect, where it is due, something that every properly educated and domestic woman should know.

The second woman of consequence in "Ennui" is Lady Geraldine, one of Maria Edgeworth's most interesting women, and one about whom Maria Edgeworth seems ambivalent. Lady Geraldine is a woman of courage and honesty, saying "Let us dare to be ourselves!" (p. 136). She is physically attractive without being inhumanly perfect:

> ... a tall finely shaped woman, with the commanding air of a woman of rank; she moved well; not with feminine timidity, but with ease, promptitude, and decision. She had fine eyes and a fine complexion, yet no regularity of feature.... Her voice was agreeable: she did not speak with the Irish accent; but when I listened maliciously, I detected certain Hibernian inflections; nothing of the vulgar Irish idiom, but something that was more interrogative, more exclamatory, and perhaps more rhetorical than the common language of English ladies, accompanied with much animation of countenance and demonstrative gesture. This appeared to me peculiar and unusual, but not affected. (p. 99)

In short, Lady Geraldine is her own woman. She presents herself to the world in an unaffected way. Again she is honest.

> Lady Geraldine was superior to manoeuvring little arts and petty stratagems to attract attention: she would not stoop, even to conquer. From gentlemen she seemed to expect attention as her right, as the right of her sex; not to beg or accept of it as a favour: if it were not paid, she deemed the gentleman degraded, not herself. (p. 149)

It does not seem that Maria Edgeworth means that Lady Geraldine expected constantly to be the cynosure of every eye at every moment. Rather, that she entirely properly expected appropriate "attention" -- "practical consideration, observant care".[1] Lord Glenthorn, by no means charitably inclined in his judgements of people, discovers that Lady Geraldine is not merely a fashionable beauty.

> High-born and high-bred, she seemed to consider more what she thought of others than what others thought of her. Frank, candid, and affable, yet opinionated, insolent and an egotist, her candour and affability appeared the effect of a naturally good temper, her insolence and egotism only those of a spoiled child. (p. 103)

> At first I thought her merely superficial and intent solely upon her own amusement; but I soon found that she had a taste for literature, beyond what could have been expected in one who lived so dissipated a life; a depth of reflection that seemed inconsistent with the rapidity with which she thought; and, above all, a degree of generous indignation

> against meanness and vice, which seemed incompatible with the selfish character of a fine lady, and which appeared quite incomprehensible to the imitating tribe of her fashionable companions. (p. 131)

Lady Geraldine has spirit, a sense of fun, intelligence, failings, strength of mind and character, and integrity. She also has a sense of propriety. She rebukes a group of her companions for their fashionable preoccupations, and is thought by them to be judgemental and proud.

> "Ha!" said Miss Ormsby, "how severe your ladyship is; and only for one's asking for a patter !"
> "But you know" pursued Mrs. O'Connor, "that lady Geraldine is too proud to take pattern from anybody." (p. 133)

It is not simply dress patterns that Lady Geraldine will not take from others; she will not bend her character to suit the fashionable model any more than she will be stiff and formal in her behaviour. Nor will she behave like a foolish rowdy girl. "How I hate hoydens!" (p. 153) she remarks.

Neither Lord Glenthorn nor, it would seem, Maria Edgeworth likes hoydens either. Glenthorn is introduced to a lively young woman by his hostess Lady Ormsby.

> She calculated that as I had been charmed by lady Geraldine's vivacity, I must be enchanted by the fine spirits of lady Jocunda Lawler.... Lady Jocunda was a high-bred romp, who made it a rule to do and say whatever she pleased. In a hundred indirect ways I was called upon to admire her charming spirits: but the rattling voice, loud laughter, flippant wit and hoyden gaiety of lady Jocunda disgusted me beyond expression. (pp. 177-78)

Two birds with one stone, Lady Ormsby's blind equation of Lady Geraldine with Lady Jocunda, and Lady Jocunda's behaviour damned together. This brevity, combined with a delicate hint of malice found only occasionally in the Tales, makes points that a student of the domestic profession is not likely to forget. By changing pace and tone to catch attention

Maria Edgeworth proves herself an expert and entertaining teacher.

Lady Geraldine is presented as a woman of charming intelligence, strong character, beauty and principle. In a sense, she might almost be seen as the ideal, though far from idealised, woman. And yet it appears that Maria Edgeworth has reservations about her. Lady Geraldine marries and is happy; she has good friends; but she is not, apparently, suitable to marry the chastened and now well-educated "hero" of "Ennui", the former Lord Glenthorn. She marries a man who leaves to serve in India, taking her with him. Maria Edgeworth is suggesting that Lady Geraldine is too strong meat for ordinary, polite and intelligent society and that she must be removed from it.

Lord Glenthorn meets and marries a much gentler, more private person, and, very importantly, one who is heir-at-law to the Glenthorn title and who is able to restore the status quo by legitimately enabling him to regain his lost possessions and position.

> Cecilia Delamere was not so entertaining but she was more interesting than lady Geraldine: the flashes of her ladyship's wit, though always striking, were sometimes dangerous: Cecilia's wit, though equally brilliant, shone with a more pleasing and inoffensive light. With as much generosity as lady Geraldine could show in great affairs, she had more forbearance and delicacy of attention on everyday occasions. Lady Geraldine had much pride, and it often gave offense; Cecilia, perhaps had more pride, but it never appeared, except upon the defensive: without having less candour, she had less occasion for it than lady Geraldine seemed to have; and Cecilia's temper had more softness and equability. Perhaps Cecilia was not so fascinating, but she was more attractive. One had the envied art of appearing to advantage in public - the other, the more desirable power of being happy in private. I admired lady Geraldine long before I loved her; I loved Cecilia long before I admired her. (pp. 260-61)

Above all, one is sure that Cecilia is safe and domestically inclined;

Lady Geraldine is described as having a "dangerous" wit. Are intelligence, honesty, independence of thought, candour, to be admired in women only so far as they do not present the possiblity of unsettling the safety and natural order of things? It seems so, for in Cecilia, Maria Edgeworth presents her reader with a textbook model of an ideal practitioner of the female profession. By juxtaposing Cecilia's characteristics with those of Lady Geraldine, Maria Edgeworth makes it unmistakably clear that moderation is desirable. Wit, generosity, pride, are quantified. Enough is enough. Here is a formula for the middle and upper-class woman to follow.

Certainly, in the next to the last tale, "Madame de Fleury", the point about moderation is reinforced. The setting of the story is mainly revolutionary France, during the Terror, a time of national danger and considerable public insecurity. Madame de Fleury is a generous and good-hearted noblewoman who is anxious to help a group of poor young girls by educating them in such a way that they will be able to earn an honest living, and make the best of themselves. She establishes a model school for them, straight from the pages of Practical Education, and engages a saintly nun to teach them basic arithmetic, to read, to write, to sew, in order that they may become seamstresses, ladies' maids, embroiderers, confectioners, or follow any decent occupation proper to the lower class. Her generosity is rewarded when her pupils rescue her from the Revolution and sustain her during her exile in England. From this example Maria Edgeworth's "students" learn what is appropriate conduct for members of the lower classes, what obligations their own more privileged positions impose, and also how to fulfil those obligations.

Victoire is the school's star pupil, and profits in every possible way from her education, becoming a good, worthy and delightful human being, as well as a successful brodeuse. Having been educated properly, she will have no part in the Revolution, and remains utterly loyal to Madame de Fleury, endangering her own life to rescue Madame after she has been denounced to the revolutionaries, and using her own hard-earned money to support the impoverished lady during her exile in England. Her fellow pupils, now all solid working-class citizens, join in the danger, and in the financial assistance to Madame de Fleury. They know their place and are anxious that the old order, represented by their positions in relation to Madame de Fleury, remain. They have been shown that each person should make the best of herself, but within the appropriate social context. Poverty and ignorance are to be overcome, but if the brightness and beauty of the world are to survive at the same time, the rich man still belongs in his castle, the poor man at his gate. Maria Edgeworth believes in the same God-ordered estate as Mrs. C.F. Alexander. The virtuous Victoire is rewarded by making an entirely suitable marriage to an equally good and appropriately educated young man, and by seeing Madame de Fleury pardoned and restored to her rightful place in France.

As often happens in Tales of Fashionable Life, instead of drawing complete portraits, Maria Edgeworth uses one dimensional characters to represent good and bad human qualities. As a skilled teller of tales Maria Edgeworth knows that wicked characters are interesting to readers. By introducing Victoire's cousin Manon, she allows her audience to enjoy briefly and harmlessly the depiction of a dissolute life. Then, by graphically describing Manon's fate, she reiterates the importance of virtue, moderation and propriety and of the woman's part in promoting

them. She is clever enough to use even examples of vice as grist to her educational mill. Victoire is wholly good, minute faults - inattention to a bouquet of flowers - serving only to illustrate her surpassing excellence. Instead of making her a credible human being, like Lady Geraldine, she is provided with a wholly bad cousin, Manon, to demonstrate the dark side of human nature which is sure to develop if education does not intervene. Manon is not one of the select twelve chosen by Madame de Fleury to be educated by the virtuous Sister Frances. Instead she falls into the hands of flatterers who encourage her talent for singing and dancing; who pay no attention to her moral health and her practical education so that "encouraged by daily petty successes in the art of deceit, she becomes a complete hypocrite",[2] and an artful creature. By contrast, Victoire, who showed signs of a talent for poetry, was not encouraged in this. Instead she was taught "plain needlework" and the "common values of arithmetic" (p. 87). To have done otherwise would have been to remove her from her proper environment, to allow her to rise above her appropriate social state, and would only lead to unhappiness. Manon, who, surely not coincidentally, has the same Christian name as the executed revolutionary Madame Roland and the unimproving Manon Lescaut, initially rises to great heights as the mistress of one of the revolutionary leaders, a former hairdresser, Villeneuf. She has money, clothes, excitement, by contrast to Victoire's straitened circumstances, especially after Victoire begins sending money to Madame de Fleury. But Victoire, having the benefit of a sound education, is not tempted by the transient pleasures of the world.

> Victoire has early acquired good principles, and that plain, steady, good sense, which goes straight to its object without being dazzled or imposed upon by sophistry. She was unacquainted with the refinements of sentiment, but she distinctly knew right from wrong, and had sufficient resolution to abide by the right. (pp. 130-31)

She remains true to Madame de Fleury and lives to see the triumph of conservative right, whilst Manon suffers after her lover is guillotined.

> From his splendid house she went upon the stage - did not succeed - sank from one degree of profligacy to another; and at last died in an hospital. (p. 139)

Virtue, represented by Victoire (again a significant name), is victorious and vice, or at least the over-turning of the proper order because of ignorance, represented by Manon, is defeated.

However, into so plain a moral tale as this, with its simple characters, creeps a problem unnoticed by Maria Edgeworth. Unnoticed or ignored. Manon may represent the evils of ignorance, but it is she who inadvertently warns Victoire of the danger to Monsieur and Madame de Fleury, because her revolutionary connections give her prior knowledge of the danger. The virtuous Victoire would have had nothing to do with the revolutionaries, except that Manon is her cousin. Without Manon she would not have been able to assist Madame de Fleury. A modicum of good has come from bad. (Of course, had everyone been properly educated and had all the aristocrats been as careful of the rules of noblesse oblige as Madame de Fleury, according to Maria Edgeworth's ideas, the Revolution would never have taken place.)

Manon's relationship to Victoire plays another much more important part in "Madame de Fleury". As cousins they come from the same family, the same social background; they have a good deal in common. But Victoire receives an education; the uneducated Manon is her "control group". Here is an "experimental proof" that education is the most powerful positive determining factor in life - one of the major themes of Essays on Professional Education.[3]

In one sense, the sex of the principal characters in "Madame de Fleury" is unimportant. Victoire could as well be Victor, and Madame de Fleury a responsible Monsieur. There is no question that the main point of the story is that the best education at the appropriate time, and at the right level, is essential to human development and to the modest improvement of the status quo. However, by choosing female pupils and a benefactress, Maria Edgeworth does make it plain that women are important, and should be educated, just as men should. Men and women may practise different professions and need different educations, but their roles in building and maintaining a well-ordered world are of equal consequence. It is easy to draw a number of conclusions about Maria Edgeworth's opinions about the proper behaviour and education of women from her descriptions of Madame de Fleury and Sister Frances. "Happy they, who, like Mad. de Fleury, possess strength of mind united with the utmost gentleness of manner and tenderness of disposition" (p. 59). Madame de Fleury is unquestionably womanly, and though childless herself, maternal, delighting in the artless talk of children in spite of being equally comfortable with "the conversation of deep philosophers and polished courtiers" (p. 76). She is also deeply conscious of the vast importance of education.

> The gift of education she believed to be more advantageous than the gift of money to the poor; as it ensures the means both of future subsistence and happiness.... Mad. de Fleury was sensible that the greatest care was necessary in the choice of the person to whom young children are to be intrusted.... (p. 64)

She is aware too that, no matter how splendid the teacher, close involvement of the parents is essential if the educational process is to be successful. She herself, in loco parentis, appeared often at the little school, to demonstrate her concern, her care and her support of Sister Frances.

The nun could have been an artist. And there were successful female painters at the time: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun springs immediately to mind. However, Maria Edgeworth approvingly has Sister Frances suppress her talents except is no far as she teaches the more modest, practical elements of art to her pupils. Maria Edgeworth seems to be indicating that it is more suitable for a woman to teach, to nurture, than to excel herself in a singularising and remarkable fashion. This is another example of Maria Edgeworth's preference for a private life, instead of a public one, already obvious in "Ennui". Here also are two more models of successful female professionals.

A situation which mimics the married state, or marriage itself seems to be essential to whole womanhood, for Maria Edgeworth. Sister Frances is at least a bride of Christ, and she has charge of children at a most crucial stage. Professional Education was primarily concerned to show how young men should be educated to be independent, to the point that the law and medicine were considered among the most desirable professions as advancement depended on personal merit, not preferment. In "Madame de Fleury" young lower class women are educated to be independently able to earn a living, even though they may well marry. Manon is unable to earn her living and is tacitly condemned by Maria Edgeworth for being wholly dependent on her lover for support. And yet, legally, married women were wholly dependent on their husbands, at whatever social level. But it must be remembered that Maria Edgeworth's voice is that of moderation. Too much female independence is dangerous. She showed her readers this with Lady Geraldine, and then there is Almeria, an independently wealthy woman who is punished by becoming unmarriageable.

Before going on to consider "Almeria", a slight story, "The Dun" should be discussed as it presents ideas at variance with those expressed in "Madame de Fleury". The main theme of the short story is the miseries caused by the non-payment of debts. A poor weaver, Mr. White, is beggared because the thoughtless Colonel Pembroke refuses to pay his tailoring bills, so the tailor refuses to pay the weaver. The weaver is almost wholly dependent on the tailor for his livelihood, so he can neither feed his family nor buy more materials to weave for other customers. In order to save him, White's daughter, Anne, almost becomes the prey of a madam, whom she innocently believes to be a kindly and charitable woman. Anne's first client is Colonel Pembroke who is so overcome by her maidenly modesty and the knowledge of the wrong he has done that he immediately alters his habits and all is made right.

The difficulty is that Mr. White has been honestly exercising his skilled trade, as Madame de Fleury's pupils had, yet he suffers. He is dependent on employers, but so were they. And he did nothing to deserve his ill-fortune. At best one can conclude that, for Maria Edgeworth, members of the working classes, male and female, cannot but be dependent on their betters. They have a responsibility to make the best of themselves, but they cannot bear the whole responsibility for their fate. That, ultimately, is the concern of their betters. If their betters are good and responsible like Madame de Fleury all will be well. If they are irresponsible like Colonel Pembroke, everyone will suffer. However, it does seem that Maria Edgeworth suggests that working-class men and women should be educated similarly to exercise similar, though limited, independence. Rudimentary education is appropriate for both men and women.

In the higher social ranges the situation is somewhat different. Men should be educated for the professions, regardless of their financial need, whereas women should use their knowledge of good literature to support their husbands and guide their children, that is to practise their own domestic profession.

Female characters are not especially important in "The Dun". The characters exist largely to represent particular virtues and vices - the poor but honest orange seller; the rich dishonest Mrs. Carver, the brothel keeper; a reprobate military man; a poor weaver, and so on. Still, as was obvious in Elizabeth Inchbald's and Amelia Opie's stories, women in fashionable life are almost as likely to become debtors as men. Maria Edgeworth apparently has sufficient respect for the intelligence of her readers to expect them to realise that not all virtues or vices belong exclusively to one sex, and that some lessons must be learned by all human beings.

"Almeria" is a much more substantial story than "The Dun", and the heroine, Almeria Turnbull, has no worries about money. Thanks to the death of her stepfather, and an unsuccessful lawsuit to deprive her of her fortune, she is financially independent. Her dependence is intellectual, or, more properly, social. Beyond the most trivial considerations she has no mind of her own. Her wants, her ambitions, her enthusiasms and her judgements are entirely based on other people's opinions. After a promising beginning, Almeria's fate is sealed by the company she keeps. This Tale is an account of her fall from grace; a fall precipitated by stupid, scheming, undomestic women. As her story opens, Almeria is the

intimate frient of Ellen Elmour, an excellent example of upper middle-class young womanhood who has "a character far superior to the little meanness of female competition and jealousy" and who is prepared to share with her friend "all the advantages of her situation."[4] Ellen is a woman perfectly suited to the proper practice of the domestic profession. Her advantages include a sound education in a house filled with well-chosen books and stimulating conversation, made possible by her kindly and intelligent old father and her equally intelligent brother. Almeria lives a comfortable life at home, but it is a home entirely lacking in intellectual stimulus, affluent financially, poverty-stricken mentally and emotionally. Still, if the pattern of "Madame de Fleury" is transferable, all should be well for Almeria. The improving influence of Miss Elmour's friendship and her provision of educational opportunities, combined with Elmour père's presence as a surrogate father should allow Almeria to develop almost as well as Ellen Elmour. But the positive influence comes too late. In her formative years Almeria's education was entirely neglected by her stepfather, whose principal entertainments were eating, drinking and enjoying the money he had made, and her character had been hopelessly malformed. (Another inconsistency is revealed here. Lord Glenthorn was able to mend his ways and become a useful member of society at a relatively late date. Even though Almeria does not entirely lose touch with the positive influence of the Elmours she is irredeemable.)

Almeria meets a provincial lady of fashion, Lady Stock. Yet again the name is symbolic; she is the wife of a banker whose fortune is based on intelligence nor inheritance, but on business. The couple is entirely worldly,

concerned only with the getting and spending of money and with following fashion. The superficial Almeria is vastly impressed by Lady Stock as she is incapable of seeing beyond the trappings of fashion to the emptiness within. When she discovers that Ellen Elmour despises Lady Stock as a mere mondaine, Almeria wavers for a moment, especially as Lady Stock's enthusiasm for her has cooled as her fortune is being contested.

> "I hate mere women of the world," cried Almeria. Ellen observed that it was not worth while to hate, it was sufficient to avoid them. - Almeria grew warmer in her abhorrence; and Ellen at last expressed ... some fear that if Miss Turnbull felt with such exquisite sensibility the neglect of persons of fashion, she might in a different situation be ambitious or vain of their favour. Almeria was offended, and was very near quarreling with her friend for harbouring such a mean opinion of her character. (p. 254)

However, Alberia's fortune is restored, she basks again in Lady Stock's exciting favour and takes seriously Lady Stock's judgement that Miss Elmour is unfashionable. The lure of fashionable life is too strong for Almeria's improperly formed mind to resist. Indeed, one condemnatory word, "unfashionable", from Lady Stock, and "a new standard for estimating merit was raised in Almeria's mind..." (p. 262). The effects of Ellen Elmour's good influence vanishes: Almeria has joined the ranks of the fashionable, and her ambitions now focus solely on what impression she will make in society, how she will be publicly assessed.

Ellen Elmour still has hopes for Almeria's salvation:

> "... I am firmly persuaded, my dear Almeria, that however you may be dazzled by the first view of what is called fashionable life, you will soon see things as they really are, and that you will return to your former tastes and feelings." (p. 271)

She is convinced that Almeria may still make a choice that "will not be that of romance, but reason" (p. 272). Miss Elmour's brother is more rapidly convinced of Almeria's fall from grace. He knows that "... she was perfectly unconscious that in this delirium of vanity and affectation she was an object of pity and disgust to the man she loved" (p. 261), and consequently beyond help or hope.

Because Almeria has become caught up in fashionable life she is as fickle as fashion itself. She accompanies Lady Stock to London and discovers that Lady Stock is no longer the arbiter of fashion she was in Yorkshire. She is a small, inept fish in a very large pond, and has nothing to offer Almeria. So Almeria finds another mentor, Lady Bradstone. Lady Bradstone is initially very impressive to Almeria as she has an assurance that Lady Stock lacked - "lady Bradstone never quoted authorities, but presumed she was a precedent for others" (p. 283). Lady Bradstone has the appearance of strong-mindedness and self-confidence, but this is based solely on transitory things; not on the firm ground that a well-educated, unworldly mind would provide.

Under Lady Stock's and Lady Bradstone's tuition Almeria loses almost all vestiges of what had once, perhaps, been a potentially decent and possibly intelligent character. She becomes, in effect, an actress, dressing and speaking to suit the public occasion. She has no real friends, no one with whom to deal privately and intimately. Her life is all surface. Almeria happens to be at a fashionable watering-place at the same time as the Elmours. She discovers old Mr. Elmour is ill, and goes to visit him, after much delay. Instead of dealing honestly

and affectionately with a man she had claimed to honour and respect, she enquires after his health with "a modish air of infinite sensitivity" (p. 288). All real sensitivity is blunted. Momentarily it returns when she discovers some time later that Mr. Elmour has died. She is grieved, but much of the grief comes from a transitory realisation of what has happened to her. A lodging-house maid innocently reveals to her what she has become, what she has lost.

> "Why, it never came into my head that you could be a friend of the family's, nor more, may be, at the utmost, than an acquaintence, as you never used to call much during his illness." (p. 299)

Maria Edgeworth warns the reader of the danger to Almeria by describing Lady Bradstone's daughters. Lady Bradstone had taken Almeria into her protection, largely because of Almeria's money, but what irresponsible protection it is if it has produced such daughters:

> Lady Gabriella was a beauty, and determined to be a Grace - but which of the three Graces she had not yet decided.
> Lady Agnes was plain, and resolved to be a wit.
> Lady Bab and lady Kitty were charming hoydens, with all the <u>modern</u> simplicity of fourteen and fifteen in their manners. (p. 291)

"These young ladies were dashers" (p. 292). Already in "Ennui" Maria Edgeworth has expressed her opinions about hoydens and dashers. Here, she presents the appalling Lady Jocunda Lawler, multiplied by four. And the weak-minded Almeria is constantly in their company. Lady Bradstone's daughters do not even honour their mother. They actively dislike and disobey her, and Lady Gabriella particularly is much enamoured of her very fashionable aunt, Lady Pierrepoint, who does not deign to know Lady Bradstone. "Lady Gabriella whispered, 'My aunt Pierrepoint cannot <u>know</u> us now, because we are with mamma" (p. 311).

Lady Pierrepoint moves in courtly circles, Lady Bradstone does not.

By this time, Almeria has developed some social cunning, has become a fashionable schemer. She considers that it will be more advantageous to be of Lady Pierrepoint's party than Lady Bradstone's, for Lady Pierrepoint can present her at court. This event becomes the focal point of Almeria's ambition. She seeks to ingratiate herself with Lady Pierrepoint by relieving her of the tedious company of her distant relative, Mrs. Vickars. Mrs. Vickars is one of the parasites with whom Maria Edgeworth surrounds many of her foolishly fashionable and rich characters. She is a lady without means who supports herself by flattering. In taking her on, Almeria commits herself irrevocably to the fashionable life. Her entourage is now complete. She has left the real world, and entered one where

> People in certain rank of life are, or making themselves, slaves to horses and carriages; with every apparent convenience and luxury they are frequently more dependent than their tradesmen or their servants. (p. 287)

This is Lady Pierrepoint's world, a wholly vicious one where people marry not for honourable, human reasons, but, as she has done - "'To increase my consequence and strengthen my connections'" (p. 317). In speaking thus Lady Pierrepoint proclaims herself the incarnation of all that the properly educated female professional should not be - a calculator, lacking in integrity, inhuman, dishonourable, vicious. Her culture and polish are valueless because she is without understanding of the proper task of a woman. From her one learns by negative example, as one does from Lady Bradstone and her daughters. Lady Bradstone stands condemned for being responsible for the trite and trivial state in which her daughters exist. Collectively these five women epitomise the destructiveness

of fashionable life. All are to despised for dishonouring the female profession when they belong to a class which should practise it diligently.

Almeria achieves her ambition and is presented at court, but it is a disappointing experience, giving her the briefest satisfaction, and leaving her life as empty as before. Her life is one composed exclusively of public events, bereft of any real human contact or value. Almeria "continued the same course of life for six years! ... the absolute slave of an imaginary necessity .... She looked in the morning so faded and haggard (by the) wear and tear of fashionable life ..." (p. 323) that even her physical qualities are eroded.

It is in Lady Pierrepoint's interest to keep Almeria unmarried so that she retains control of her own fortune, that is, so that Almeria's fortune is wholly at Lady Pierrepoint's disposal. Almeria, a fast-fading beauty, falls in love, but is cheated of her would-be husband by Lady Gabriella, a woman she thought a friend, though a bought one. Her life is entirely without point, and as she had long ago abandoned all responsibility for independent thought or action, and as she has become used to following the random dictates of her fashionable companions, she feels entirely helpless.

> Weak minds are subject to this apprehension of control from secret sources utterly inadequate to their supposed effects; and thus they put their destiny into the hands of persons who could not otherwise obtain influence over their fate. (p. 325)

Almeria, once a prey to male fortune hunters seeks solace by becoming "a female title-hunter" (p. 341), and an unsuccessful one. Prematurely aged, uninteresting, and with her fortune depleted, she has nothing to

offer anyone. Long ago she forfeited the right to private or domestic happiness, when she antagonised her only true friends. She is doomed to a life sustained only by petty flatteries; a life lived totally superficially, largely playing cards in public places of amusement. To heighten the misery of her situation, she, and the reader, are presented with the domestic bliss of the Elmours, both married happily, both parents, both enjoying the delightful society of an interesting and intelligent duchess who is beyond Almeria's social or intellectual reach. The malign and pernicious influence of vicious and socially striving women has ruined Almeria's life. The love of a good man, Frederick Elmour, was not enough to save her, neither was the disinterested friendship of Ellen Elmour. One assumes that this was because Almeria, ultimately, could do nothing to help herself, though she did much to harm herself.

Given Maria Edgeworth's emphasis on the importance of female influence on the development of mind, manner and character one might assume that, had Almeria lived with a widowed mother, or had her guardian been possessed of an intelligent wife she would have fared better. The more desirable qualities, deeply-buried but nevertheless present in her, would have grown and prospered. As the story stands, it is Maria Edgeworth's most solemn warning to women. Originally Almeria had promise, so her fate is much more painful to herself and to the reader. Maria Edgeworth uses this tale to counsel continued attention to the proper practice of the female profession. One does not simply acquire the proper education, article, and then practise the domestic profession successfully ever afterwards. Almeria started fairly well, she apprenticed

with the professionally sound Ellen Elmour, but she failed utterly to maintain domestic standards so was disbarred from membership in the ranks of the properly female. Her punishment was to be denied the rewards of the successful practitioner of the female profession - home, family, intimate friends.

The eponymous hero of "Vivian", in similar circumstances to Almeria but with a mother to help him, fared slightly better. He at least was allowed to make an honourable end, instead of being left to wither away ignobly. Like Almeria, Vivian has an inconstant mind. His opinions change not with the wind, but with those of his companions. Vivian's changing enthusiasms lead him to a series of romantic attachments; to become a Member of Parliament and to marry a woman he does not love for the sake of his career. Finally his ill-considered behaviour leads to a duel and his death. His mother, the widowed Lady Mary Vivian, is one of the formative influences on his life. Lady Mary is a good woman, though with a marked capacity for foolishness on occasion. Nonetheless, she is one of Maria Edgeworth's successful female characters, from a literary point of view; a fully-developed woman with a reasonable range of character traits. She is kind; rather over-indulgent of her son; wants the best for him, but is not always able to judge what is truly best; can be ill-tempered and self-centred. But she is essentially a good, normally sensitive and intelligent person. That she is to be looked at fairly favourably by the reader, Maria Edgeworth makes plain, early in the novel. The moral hero of "Vivian" is his tutor, Mr. Russell, a man of infinite wisdom and goodness. He judges Lady Mary thus:

> "... all the world says that lady Mary Vivian, though a woman of fashion, is remarkably well-informed and domestic; and, judging from those of her letters which you have shown me, I should think that, for once, what all the world says is right." (p. 4)

If Maria Edgeworth, through Mr. Russell, is to allow Lady Mary's virtues to compensate for her being "a woman of fashion", then she must be morally acceptable, and, if not a model mother, at least not one to be despised, either by her son or the reader. She exists to remind the reader that perfection is not easily achieved and that even the most loving mother must work hard if she is to meet the obligations that professing domesticity imposes. She had a major weakness and Vivian, being more perceptive than he usually is, describes it:

> "... a woman, let her be ever so sensible, cannot well educate an only son, without some manly assistance.... So I grew up, seeing with her eyes, hearing with her ears, and judging with her understanding, till, at length, it was found out that I had not eyes, ears, or understanding of my own." (p. 5)

Worse, Vivian has womanly faculties in a man's world. A father may successfully educate a daughter, as is obvious from the account of Ellen Elmour in "Almeria", but a woman, no matter how well-equipped, cannot do full justice to the education of a son. The presence of a father's influence, or at least that of a tutor like Russell during the early years of Vivian's life might have saved him. Russell came too late for Vivian to profit fully from his instruction and example; they met only when Vivian went up to university. (And yet Glenthorn lived a far more dissolute life and was able to reform. Was the good Lady Mary's undiluted female influence so damaging that nothing could really save her son's life?) Vivian is to spend his life vacillating in all things; only when he chooses death is he single-minded and clear of purpose.

Of her stock characters, one knows exactly what Maria Edgeworth thinks. In describing those one-dimensional figures she makes her position clear. However, when she draws more fully human portraits it is more difficult to discover exactly what her opinions are, as with Lady Geraldine. Like all good teachers she makes her students work at learning their lessons, though she does reward by entertaining too. There seems little doubt that Maria Edgeworth does not despise nor mock Lady Mary, nor regard her as a figure of fun. Indeed, beyond her failure to educate her son properly, Maria Edgeworth allows Lady Mary many attractive human qualities. She endows her with a capacity for real, as opposed to merely exemplary, affection and friendship for another woman, something that appears nowhere else in the Tales. Initially, Vivian is enamoured of Miss Selina Sidney, a prudent and intelligent woman of no fortune. Lady Mary would prefer a better social and financial match for her son, but seeing him apparently determined to marry Miss Sidney, Lady Mary reasons that "since compliance was now unavoidable, she was determined that it should be gracious" (p. 25). Maria Edgeworth leaves no doubt that Lady Mary will act on her resolution; she is described as being "incapable of double-dealing" (p. 29), and that seems to include being honest with herself, keeping private promises. Indeed, Lady Mary and Selina Sydney become firm friends, and remain so even after Vivian has given his affections to another woman. Yet, behind everything Maria Edgeworth manages to make the reader believe that Lady Mary is more responsible for Vivian's difficulties than Almeria's stepfather was for hers. She creates a strong sense of the domestic power of women to shape lives, never suggesting that there is a male counterpart. But she never lets one forget that if this power is wielded by someone in the slightest

degree domestically irresponsible it will lead to trouble. All Lady Mary's loving attention to her son cannot compensate for her lack of judgement and her foolishness which turn him into the vacillating man he remains throughout his life. Beyond Lady Mary there are no fully developed female characters in "Vivian", though there are several who represent desirable and undesirable female qualities and who express opinions which give clues about Maria Edgeworth's ideas. The closest to a well-rounded character is ultimately to be Vivian's wife.

Vivian is elected to the House of Commons and meets the ultra-fashionable Mrs. Wharton, wife of one of his fellow members. Both Mr. and Mrs. Wharton wish their marriage to end, but Mrs. Wharton does not want to divorce her husband, leaving him free to marry again. The conniving Mrs. Wharton compromises Vivian into fleeing with her to the continent. He does not love her, but believes that because gossip has connected their names, honour demands that he accompany her. Letters he writes to Miss Sidney and Mrs. Wharton are placed in the wrong envelopes, and this mistake ensures that Vivian loses, not Miss Sidney's love, but any possibility of marrying her. Her potentially stabilising influence on him vanishes. Vivian's "elopement" is a major setback, but he manages to continue his career, strongly supported by his mother, and he becomes involved with a noble family, the Glistonburys. Russell enters his life again because he is tutor to the Glistonburys' son, Lord Lidhurst.

The Glistonburys have two daughters; the elder is Lady Sarah, product of Lady Glistonbury's first marriage, and of the efforts of her governess, Miss Strictland.

> Lady Glistonbury, abhorrent of what she termed modern philosophy, and classing under that name almost all science and literature, especially all attempts to cultivate the understanding of women had with the assistance of her double, Miss Strictland, brought up lady Sarah in all the ignorance and all the rigidity of the most obsolete of the old school; she had made lady Sarah precisely like herself; with virtue stiff, dogmatical, and repulsive; with religion, gloomy and puritanical; with manners cold and automatic.... (pp. 149-50)

Conservatism Maria Edgeworth seems to approve; the reactionary, as represented by these ladies, she does not. It too is a deviation from the status quo, an attempt to return to the bad old days, and as destructive as supposedly progressive revolution. Besides doing harm to her elder daughter, Lady Glistonbury had committed another unpardonable sin: "by her unaccommodating temper and the obstinacy of her manifold virtues ... (she had) succeeded in alienating the affections of her husband" (p. 150). Automatic virtue, uninformed by education, is just as reprehensible for Maria Edgeworth as the vice that results from ignorance.

The younger Lady Lidhurst, Julia, is much more lively than her half-sister. She is an embryonic Lady Geraldine. Presently her governess is a Miss Bateman, better known as Rosamunda, an actress manquée, who completely lacks the moral and intellectual fibre to be a governess. She describes herself perfectly, unintentionally, when she quotes Pope's judgement "'Most women have no characters at all'" (p. 168). Lady Julia is in danger of becoming much too "modern" in her ideas. She has advanced opinions

> "Men - all men but one - treat women as puppets and then wonder that they are not rational creatures! ... a year or two ago, I should, in the ignorance in which I was dogmatically brought up, have thought it was my duty to submit implicitly to parental authority, and to receive a husband from the hands of a father without consulting

> either my own heart or my own judgement. But, since my mind has been enlightened and has opened to higher views of the dignity of my sex, and higher hopes of happiness, my ideas of duty have altered; and, I trust, I have sufficient courage to support my own ideas of the rights of my sex, and my firm conviction of what is just and becoming." (p. 172)

These thoughts are, for Maria Edgeworth, like Lady Geraldine's, much too advanced, too potentially dangerous to be allowed free rein. No doubt Maria Edgeworth would not question the importance of a woman's ability to exercise a well-informed mind, nor her capability to make sound judgements. But Lady Julia has only the will to do so, not the means, and to fly in the face of parental authority cannot be condoned. Order must be maintained.

Still, Maria Edgeworth seems to have sympathy for Lady Julia; it is from her mouth that sage advice about marriage comes to Vivian, and to the reader.

> "Should you not, therefore, in that bosom friend, a wife, look for certain firmness and stability of character, capable of resisting, rather than disposed to yield, to sudden impulse; a character, not of enthusiasm, but of duty; a mind, which, instead of increasing, by example and sympathy, the defects of your own ... should correct or compensate these by opposite qualities?" (p. 235)

Lady Julia's advice is sound, but, as Maria Edgeworth points out, she does not understand the dangers of giving advice, however good, that is either unsought or completely at variance with real possibilities.

> The advice of friends is often highly useful to prevent an imprudent match; but it seldom happens that marriages turn out happily which have been made from the opinions of others rather than the parties concerned; for, let the general reasons on which the advice is grounded be ever so sensible, it is scarcely possible that the advisor can take in all the little circumstances of taste and temper, upon which much of the happiness or misery of domestic life depends. (p. 263)

Vivian marries his exact opposite, Lady Sarah, following Lady Julia's advice, though he much preferred Lady Julia. The marriage is unsatisfactory, and so is Maria Edgeworth's treatment of it. This is particularly unfortunate as it seems that in Lady Sarah, Maria Edgeworth is developing another model for her readers. But she does not give enough evidence for the reader to use the model. She shows that somehow Lady Sarah has developed human warmth and feeling. But she keeps those qualities hidden except in the most private of circumstances. She also reveals that Lady Sarah is not so woefully ignorant as her mother would have her be, except about the duties of a loving wife. Lady Sarah

> ... had been taught that she should neither read, speak, nor think of love; and she had been so far too much restricted on this subject, that, absolutely ignorant and unconscious even of her own danger, she now pursued her course without chart or compass. (p. 359)

Lady Sarah loves Vivian with dog-like, confining, and to him, repellent, devotion. Together they might have developed their complementary characters to form a happy union, but here Maria Edgeworth is too dogmatic and didactic to allow for a credible happy ending. Instead, Vivian dies in a duel, fought with the recurrent Mr. Wharton, who has impugned his political honour. Just before the duel is fought Vivian realises the value of his now pregnant wife. He makes the proper arrangements for her support and is killed. The day he dies Lady Sarah gives birth to a stillborn boy. The Vivian line has ceased, and so, probably, will that of the Glistonburys. Lord Lidhurst died, leaving Lady Sarah to carry on the title, and it seems unlikely, at the novel's end, that she will remarry.

In spite of Maria Edgeworth's awkward and unconvincing handling of

the process of Lady Sarah's development from reactionary iceberg to human being and loving wife, she does give here the clearest finished picture of her idea of the perfect domestic professional, and hence, the ideal wife. She also presents the well-founded marriage. Lady Sarah is actually well-educated in a traditional sense and, as her conversations during an election reveal, well-informed politically. Her coldness is apparently nothing more than an over-abundance of entirely proper reserve. Lady Sarah is used to demonstrate Maria Edgeworth's ideas about the privacy of interior life, of deeply felt emotion. For Lady Sarah is capable of intense feeling, but this trait is never presented immediately to the reader, or to the world. Lady Sarah is so deeply in love with Vivian that, the love being unrequited, she becomes ill. It would, in Maria Edgeworth's terms, be unseemly to show passion of any kind directly, so Lady Sarah's maid reports her mistress's indisposition. As in classical drama, a confidante of the same sex informs an audience about violent action that has taken place "off-stage". And, in accordance with convention, the knowing person is a servant. It is obvious that Maria Edgeworth believed that even in real life strong feelings should be reserved for private occasions. She seems to see life lived in reality, and in fiction, at four clearly defined levels. There is public life, which encompasses a wide range from life in the totally public world of the M.P., for example, at one end of the scale, to the public life of dinner parties, shopping and other everyday activities at the other. There is domestic life, which is lived only among relatives and intimate friends. Both these are fit subjects for fiction. There is the intensely private life lived by a husband and wife, siblings, lovers, and the closest of friends, and finally there

is the most intimate relationship of all, personal interior life, self with self. These last relationships are not even to be revealed in domestic situations most of the time and are certainly not to be dealt with in the public medium of fiction. To do so would be to commit a kind of intellectual indecent exposure. So, Lady Sarah's love must be reported rather than personally revealed. In reality, affection and devotion may be seen domestically, but passion is entirely private. Passion is an important element in education for the female profession by its absence from the text. Lady Sarah's taciturnity about her passionate love is used as a rhetorical device to teach a moral lesson. Maria Edgeworth may be seen to be condemning the passionate effusions in, for example, Corinne, by providing an admirable opposite example.

Another reason for Maria Edgeworth to insist on the privacy of passion is that it is an exclusive emotion, keeping out all but those immediately involved. Such exclusiveness prevents the proper working of domestic society, of the family. This particular observation must be based on Maria Edgeworth's own experience during her father's marriage to Honora Sneyd. The two soulmates were so passionately involved with each other at all levels that they failed in their domestic duties as parents, and Richard Edgeworth continued to neglect his estates. Observation alone might well suggest that such passion would be problematic, but Maria Edgeworth knew from experience. The same personal experience undoubtedly led to her belief that a reasonable, practical marriage was more desirable than a totally romantic love match. The marriage between Vivian and Lady Sarah is not a loving one initially, at least as far as Vivian is concerned, but, though too late, love and respect develop.

Love is a necessary but not a sufficient ingredient for a marriage to be successful in personal and, equally importantly, social terms. Lord Glenthorn marries happily, but properly, socially speaking, as does Lord Colambre in "The Absentee". That Vivian's marriage does not end in his physical salvation is purely his fault and his mother's. He is the weak link. Lady Sarah is more or less ideal; the circumstances of Vivian's marriage are appropriate to his upbringing and education. One is shown plainly how good the marriage could have been, had there been the possibility of mutual support. For again it is plain, that for Maria Edgeworth, the successful bourgeois or upper class marriage is contracted by two equally, though differently, qualified and responsible people. Unfortunately, in "Vivian" Maria Edgeworth does not offer such clear professional instruction as she does elsewhere.

Lady Julia appears destined for spinsterhood. She could not marry the man of her choice, Mr. Russell, so she chooses not to marry at all. She lives a retired life. Her "talents, and ... fine, generous disposition" (p. 270) will not be shared intimately with anyone. She will live a life exactly the opposite of Almeria's, and one equally wasteful; a solitary life instead of a domestic one. Her fate, like Vivian's, seems to be the result of being "injudiciously educated" (p. 270). Another potentially useful member of the female profession lost.

Lady Mary Vivian was a fashionable lady, but human. Mrs. Beaumont in "Manoeuvring" is a dazzling silly creature. She is a schemer, a game-player of impressive proportions. She is incapable of acting straightforwardly; everything has to be contrived or manoeuvred. The whole Tale

is an account of Mrs. Beaumont's plans for meetings, romances and marriages and the failure of all intricate plots. Mrs. Beaumont cannot possibly say what she means. This entirely foolish dishonesty is amusing too, and it is the butt of Maria Edgeworth's wit in one of her funniest stories. It is also the least didactically obvious of the Tales. Perhaps this is because Mrs. Beaumont is too foolish to do any real harm. She is "discovered" by the sensible Mr. Walsingham on the third page of the Tale - there is nothing hidden or insidious about her ploys. She is transparent. Her children are inconvenienced by her, but their long-dead father's blood and some education ensure that they are neither like nor influenced by her. Maria Edgeworth is also suggesting that Mrs. Beaumont's basic, frequently-hidden, good-hearted motherliness, for all her short-comings, has contributed something to the well-being of her children even though she is, domestically, a "bad" mother. In this she is a little like Lady Mary Vivian. Only a neighbour, the endlessly trivial Albina Hunter is in her power, and she is a woman too stupid even to manoeuvre. Mrs. Beaumont is an example of the kind of woman who assumes that all people must have the same motives and preoccupations as she does.

> ... it is the misfortune of artful people that they cannot believe others to be artless: either they think simplicity of character folly; or else they suspect that openness is only affected, as a bait to draw them into snares. (p. 6)

Here is more teaching by negative example, this time for fun.

But the reader should not assume that Maria Edgeworth admires absolutely artless women. Mrs. Wynne in "Almeria" was one such: "a woman of excellent heart, and absolutely incapable of suspecting that others could be less frank or less friendly than herself..." (p. 335).

Her unintelligent goodness of heart added considerably to Almeria's troubles, because it allowed her to interfere mindlessly, and to be incapable of considering the consequences of her actions.

Maria Edgeworth's high-minded and practical purpose is less evident in "Manoeuvring" than in any other of the Tales, even though the faults of the "heroine" are more frequently and blatantly displayed than elsewhere. Perhaps for these reasons this is one of the most entertaining of Maria Edgeworth's Tales. It is also one where her chosen form - the "romantic" but moral, tale - and the content fit most happily together. The comic marriage of Mrs. Beaumont to Sir John Hunter, the man intended for her unwilling daughter, and his subsequent loss of a fortune because of the dramatic rescue, by her daughter's true love, of the female heir-at-law, are precisely the appropriate punishments for the relatively modest fashionable crime of manoeuvring. No one in "Manoeuvring" is seriously damaged by the monstrous Mrs. Beaumont. No one takes her seriously, except parasites and the excessively limited Miss Hunter. Each time Mrs. Beaumont and Miss Hunter open their mouths they reveal themselves. Comments aside by the sensible Mr. Walsingham and the essentially canny Mrs. Palmer add to the amusement. "Manoeuvring", filled with conversation and dialogue is almost like a play, and this too adds to the less serious tone, takes it almost out of the "good literature" category so important to Maria Edgeworth. Although it still has a didactic purpose it should perhaps be seen not so much as a chapter in a coherent textbook to educate women, but as carefully-planned light relief, preparing the reader for more serious efforts to come, refreshing her after past efforts, but never letting her lose sight of the educational process in train.

With the story of "Emilie de Coulanges" the textbook is re-opened. Emilie is an innocent émigrée from the French Revolution given shelter in London, together with her vacuous mother, by the fashionable Mrs. Somers. This Tale describes the trials of the charming Emilie as she tries to cope with Mrs. Somers' fashionably fickle behaviour, the relief provided by the laudable Lady Littleton, a model woman, domestic instead of fashionable, and Emilie's eventual marriage to a mysterious stranger who proves to be Mrs. Somers' son.

Mrs. Somers is another kind of silly and insincere woman, much more dangerous than Mrs. Beaumont because she appears much less foolish and malicious than she really is, and because she causes real pain to honest people. The Coulanges are virtually destitute because of the collapse of their Paris bank, and because of their refugee status, so they are wholly dependent on Mrs. Somers' largesse. Emilie would gladly show her gratitude, but Mrs. Somers makes it "plain" she desires no thanks. Actually, she behaves like this only for form's sake, glorying in a sense of enormous benevolence, and not expecting to be taken at her word. When she is cheated of fulsome praise and obliged gratitude, she behaves rather like a spoiled child who has been denied a present. Emilie does not understand the rules of polite and fashionable society as interpreted by Mrs. Somers, in spite of being brought up by the most worldly of mothers. Mrs. Somers usually means the opposite of what she says "'I have long since found out the motives of delicacy are usually the excuse of weak minds for not speaking the plain truth to their friends.'"[5] She pooh-poohs "motives of delicacy" and yet consistently fails to speak plainly. Consequently "Sometimes she (Emilie) offended by differing,

sometimes by agreeing, in taste or opinion with Mrs. Somers" (p. 168). Emilie never knows how to behave honestly, being innocently caught in the game of trying to second-guess Mrs. Somers. The latter is frequently at odds with herself, "words of praise were accompanied by strong feelings of displeasure" (p. 172). In addition, Mrs. Somers likes making publicly obvious, grandly generous gestures, but is niggardly with small private services. She is very unlike the truly generous Madame de Fleury, and also unlike her mirror-image friend, Lady Littleton, to whom she complains about Emilie's behaviour. Lady Littleton is a sensible and sensitive woman. She does not give up expensive paintings to pay guests' expenses, but she is open-handed with the "trifling sacrifices, which it would not have suited Mrs. Somers's temper to make: for there was no glory to be gained from them" (p. 216). When Emilie sprains her ankle, and is confined to bed, Mrs. Somers is always too busy to visit her or spend time with her, she merely pokes her head in the door, utters an empty sentence and leaves. "Lady Littleton made no complimentary speeches, but every day she contrived to spend some time with Emilie..." (p. 216). These are domestic services, private gestures, and as such are both a woman's duty and admirable. Mrs. Somers' public largesse is vulgar, improper and somehow unfeminine. It smacks of a business transaction because she sells the paintings and this is not the province of the domestic professional. As a practitioner of the female profession Mrs. Somers is a decided failure.

Mrs. Somers is another version of Mrs. Beaumont and Almeria, and a much less pleasant one than either, as she seeks glory and praise more vigorously than either of the others. Here is a woman who cannot be

content with the small but real rewards of private gratitude and personal satisfaction. She craves publicity. She is also dishonest, refusing to say what she means, but expecting her hearers to guess her meaning, and disliking them when they fail. Mrs. Somers is a warning against insincerity and Lady Littleton another model for readers to copy. The former represents the shallows of fashionable life, the latter the delights and duties of domesticity.

"The Absentee", the last of the Tales of Fashionable Life describes the progress of Lord and Lady Clonbrony from London back to Ireland, where they belong. To please his wife, Lord Clonbrony agreed to live in London and allowed his Irish estates to be mismanaged. Lady Clonbrony loves London's high society, and makes a fool of herself trying to ape its manners, its accents and its accoutrements. Their son, Lord Colambre, realises that duty requires that they return to Ireland, and that once there, they will understand that real happiness and satisfaction come from fulfilling obligations and leading a modest and quiet life. The lesson is a simple one, but Maria Edgeworth conveys it in a complex and entertaining story rich with detail.

Dealing with Lady Clonbrony and another absentee from Ireland, Lady Berryl, Maria Edgeworth suggests unusually forcefully that irresponsible women who fail in their domestic duty cause great harm. Her didactic voice becomes accusatory. No reader could misunderstand her message. Women who do not provide proper domestic support for their menfolk risk causing social damage on a scale far greater than that caused by irresponsible men.

> "All this evil has arisen from lady Berryl's passion for living in London and at watering places. She has made her husband an ABSENTEE - an absentee from his home, his affairs, his duties and his estate."[6]

Speaking for Maria Edgeworth, Lord Colambre accuses his mother:

> "Mother, in compliance with your wishes my father left Ireland - left his home, left his duties, his friends, his natural connexions, and for many years he has lived in England, and you have spent many seasons in London." (p. 287)

Throughout "The Absentee" Maria Edgeworth makes her strongest case yet about the potentially destructive power of fashionable, undomestic women:

> ... one worthless woman, especially one worthless English woman of rank, does incalculable mischief in a country like this, which looks up to the sister country for fashion. (p. 132)

> Those who are best acquainted with the heart or imagination of men will be most ready to acknowledge that the combined charms of wit, beauty, and flattery, may, for a time, suspend the action of right reason in the mind of the greatest philosopher, or operate against the resolutions of the greatest heroes. (p. 182)

But she also shows, with Lady Clonbrony, how a woman can learn to be admirably domestic, allowing her to reform, to discover the delights of her proper country and place in society. Ultimately Lady Clonbrony becomes a model for readers to copy, one not too daunting in her perfection. Lady Clonbrony is a good-hearted woman, truly fond of her husband, her son, and her admirable adopted daughter, Grace Nugent.

> "Indeed, then, she's a sweet girl, and I'm very partial to her, there's the truth," cried lady Clonbrony, in an undisguised Irish accent, and with her natural warm manner. But, a moment afterwards, her features and her whole form resumed their constrained stillness and stiffness... (p. 23)

Maria Edgeworth says quite clearly that Lady Clonbrony is a worthwhile person, provided her public personality does not over-ride her true,

private self.

> A few foibles out of the question, such as her love of fine people, her affectation of being English, and other affectations too tedious to mention, lady Clonbrony was really a good woman, had good principles, moral and religious, selfishness not immediately interfering, she was good-natured; and, though her whole soul and attention were so completely absorbed in the duties of acquaintanceship that she did not know it, she really had affections - they were concentrated on a few near relations. (p. 58)

Lady Clonbrony has a little real selfishness, and fire too, she is not unbelievably submissive. "My happiness has a right to be as much considered as your father's, Colambre, or any body's; and in one word, I won't do it... (p. 283). At first she strenuously objects to returning to Ireland. But Lady Clonbrony is no fool. She will not allow wrong to triumph, once she understands what is right, so back to Ireland she goes, and one absentee problem is solved. As well, Maria Edgeworth can use the Clonbronys to depict a happy, productive marriage between equals which ultimately contributes to the public good. They gave their son the education which enabled him to overcome the handicap of their now corrected imperfections, and allowed him to restore order to their estates. It also rendered him eligible to marry the charming and intelligent Grace Nugent, once her legitimacy is established.

"The Absentee" is probably the best-known of the Tales of Fashionable Life, and the most widely read today. However, in the context of Tales of Fashionable Life as a textbook for the profession of domesticity, it should be seen as a culminating chapter, a peroration, rather than the independent entity it has become. Its plots and characters have appeared before. The principals, the Clonbronys are absentee land-owners, as in

"Ennui". Their intelligent and well-educated son, Lord Colambre is reminiscent of the reformed Lord Glenthorn, with touches of young Mr. Elmour and Mr. Russell. Miss Broadhurst, charming, clear-thinking, strong of mind is an English version of Lady Geraldine, and so will not be allowed by her creator to marry Colambre. Instead, he will wed Grace Nugent, as perfect a wife for him as Cecilia Delamere was for Glenthorn. The vulgar and pretentious Lady Dashfort has all the detestable characteristics of Almeria's destructive mentors. Maria Edgeworth's treatment of these characters is more vigorous than in the previous Tales, and she describes scenes of facile social life in London and productive urban and rural life in Ireland vividly. She also cleverly juxtaposes descriptions of sharp-practising London businessmen with pictures of honest Irish counterparts. She uses this final Tale to present again particularly striking depictions of responsible land-owners supported by virtuous wives, and of the attractions of respon-sible conduct. Her design is to make emulation seem not only possible but desirable.

No new themes are introduced in "The Absentee" but, in true text-book fashion, this last Tale is a reiteration and restatement of pre-vious lessons, with variations on old themes for the sake of emphasis. It is a review of the most important elements in female education for domesticity, and a rehearsal of the natural and social characteristics that the successful domestic professional must possess. Women must understand thoroughly the nature of their husbands' responsibilities, and must modify their own behaviour to support their husbands in the fulfilling of obligations. They must be high-principled, moral,

unselfish and, pace some contemporary critics, religious, if Lady Clonbrony is to be a model, which she is. At least a modicum of wit, charm and spirit is called for. However, all these qualities, whether acquired or inherited, go for naught if their owners are not both properly placed socially, and appropriate wives for their husbands. For example, illegitimacy precludes marriage, and there must be reasonable hope of harmony of personality. Lord and Lady Clonbrony are well-suited, as are Colambre and Grace. Above all, by dealing first and last with the problems created by absentee landlords, and women's part in solving the problems, Maria Edgeworth stresses how important is the domestic role of women in the smooth running of public and private life.

CONCLUSION

Between 1770 and 1830 radical change was in the air. In America and Europe old social orders had been overturned and new ones established. In the midst of these upheavals, in England and Ireland, the landed gentry continued to exist as they had for two hundred years. Richard and Maria Edgeworth belonged to this class and, not merely for selfish reasons, but because they saw a responsible gentry as a powerful force for social harmony and orderly progress, they wished to see the gentry preserved and strengthened. They believed that there were irresponsible members of their class who undermined it from within. They also believed that the pernicious influence of frivolous minor aristocrats and vulgar nouveaux riches weakened it from without. Maria Edgeworth makes this abundantly clear in Tales of Fashionable Life. Both Edgeworths seem convinced that new attempts to inform all "professionals" of, and educate them in, their traditional responsibilities would revitalise the class as a whole. It would continue to function, with renewed vigour, as a stabiliser in a dangerously unsettled world.

In Essays on Professional Education Richard Edgeworth straightforwardly and forthrightly described the education necessary, and the personal qualities to be developed, to make, for example, a sound lawyer, statesman, landed gentleman or cleric. He discussed specific curricula and explained how they meshed with public and private education. He was quite blunt. Any boy or young man who followed the course of education he outlined would become a valuable member of a profession and would embody the qualities necessary for the effective survival of the gentry.

Maria Edgeworth, as certain as her father of the need for the gentry, added a different dimension to ensuring their survival. She concentrated on the importance of gentlewomen. She undertook first to demonstrate that appropriately educated women had a professional role equal to, but different from men. Their sphere was to be the domestic one. Education was necessary to succeed here because, as she showed time and again, though any woman could bear a child, only a consciously domestic and responsible one could be a "good" mother. Secondly, she offered a suitable educational system and text in the form of fiction. Thirdly, she showed how the end results of her educational process should appear, by drawing portraits of a variety of exemplary domestically educated women. These were standards by which those she taught could measure their progress or success. All three parts of her project are contained within Tales of Fashionable Life.

Just as her father's Essays on Professional Education suggested strongly that he knew best how to educate men for their professions, and their joint text, Practical Education, demonstrates the absolute confidence of the writers in their ability to prescribe education for young children, Tales of Fashionable Life leave the reader in no doubt that Maria Edgeworth knew what constituted a sound education for the profession of domesticity. Moreover, she knew that the lessons must be learned. To deny this would be to render oneself automatically unfit to practise the female profession in any of its aspects. Maria Edgeworth evinced no doubts about her fitness to teach, and the evidence of her own education and experience justifies her faith. By and large Maria Edgeworth was a generous teacher, and one who was also willing to

entertain. She recognised the existence of human weakness, and the difficulties of modifying one's nature to conform to desirable social patterns. Only out-and-out viciousness and the repeated missing of chances to improve were condemned. Nevertheless, there is an imperative tone to the didacticism. It is implicit that, if Maria Edgeworth herself, and two of her stepmothers, could become models of domestic professional excellence, why should others be allowed to fail? Throughout Tales of Fashionable Life Maria Edgeworth developed formulae for right conduct in many domestic situations and provided examples of improper behaviour so clear and so obvious that only a fool could miss them. Her approach emphasised both the courage of her convictions and the overt didactic purpose of the Tales.

Many of her women exist solely as one-dimensional, instructive figures, but this does not prevent them from conveying her ideas clearly. Several principles emerge. Women belong happily and suitably in private, domestic situations where they can sustain and support men, usually husbands, and children, their own and others'. In order to do this effectively they must be well-educated so is to make the most of their intelligence. Women who lead only, or mainly, public lives, whether academically well-educated or not, are somehow not entirely feminine and potentially dangerous. And women, whether in public or private, are suggested to have greater capacity to do harm than good if they fail at their female profession: Lady Beryll was seen to be solely responsible for her husband's absence from Ireland, but Lady Mary Vivian's good intentions could not save her son, even when combined with his wife's strength.

"Modern" girls earn Maria Edgeworth's complete contempt. Strong, intelligent women like Lady Geraldine, and to some extent Lady Julia, discomfort her, although she seems to have a hint of admiration for them. They move too far and too fast for Miss Edgeworth's taste, or for her peace of mind; for she shows in her treatment of her female characters she is no revolutionary. Her ideal woman preserves the status quo, perhaps improves the quality of life, but makes no attempt to alter it radically, unless something is patently wrong. Victoire, Cecilia Delamere, Grace Nugent all ensure that social order is maintained or restored; that titles and fortunes are returned to their rightful owners; that people learn to be content with their lot, and not to step outside their pre-ordained places. Self-sacrifice on the part of women to preserve the status quo is both admired and expected. Victoire's provision of money to Madame de Fleury, and Lady Clonbrony's return to Ireland are examples.

Behind her conviction lurks a small sense of fear, the feeling that Maria Edgeworth valued safety beyond all things. But such fear is perfectly right and proper in the turbulent world in which Maria Edgeworth lived. It does not vitiate her teaching; instead it emphasises the burning need for her kind of education. Not to feel disquieted would be to show dangerous ignorance of the state of the world. Let there be good landlords in Ireland so that tenants have no cause to rise up - no revolutionary Manons in Ireland, only justly-treated and loyal Victoires. Make certain that mothers and wives do their utmost to ensure that their sons and husbands fill their places in society properly so that the upper classes are dependable and the lower classes may safely depend on them.

Maria Edgeworth preaches not only dependability but independence - moral and intellectual independence for both men and women. The dire consequences of Almeria's and Vivian's dependence are a stern lesson for her readers. Independence that rides even slightly roughshod over other people's rights and privileges is not encouraged though. Lady Geraldine's "Let us dare to be ourselves" (p. 136) goes too far for women. It suggests that the individual is more important than society. That is why Lady Geraldine and her brand of independence had to be sent to India, out of harm's way. Maria Edgeworth shows individuality and independence working within the framework of established social order. The woman competently practising her domestic profession should strive to improve "things as they are", not to change them radically. After all, domesticity is a profession as rooted in tradition, precedent and experience as the law. Violent change would run counter to all the educational, social and moral precepts expressed in Maria Edgeworth's textbook of domesticity, the female profession - Tales of Fashionable Life.

Throughout their lives Maria and Richard Edgeworth were interested, theoretically and practically, in education. In fact, both were educational theorists and teachers. As early as 1795, Letters for Literary Ladies made manifest Maria Edgeworth's interest in education for women. At the turn of the century the time was right for their theoretical considerations and practical experience to be given fuller public expression. Together they wrote Practical Education for the guidance of teachers of children. With his daughter's help Richard Edgeworth produced Essays on Professional Education for the instruction of would-be professional men and their mentors. Alone, and in a different

form, Maria Edgeworth produced a textbook for women, Tales of Fashionable Life.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1] Richard Edgeworth, Preface to Tales of Fashionable Life, by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. iv.

[2] Richard Edgeworth, Essays on Professional Education (London: J. Johnson, 1809), pp. 247-8.

[3] Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, ed. Miriam Kramnick (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1978), p. 283.

[4] Randolph Trumbach, The Rise of the Egalitarian Family (New York: Academic Press, 1978), passim.

[5] Mark Girouard, Life in the English Country House (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1980), pp. 213-244.

CHAPTER ONE

[1] Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 1-145, et passim.

[2] Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters, ed. F.V. Barry (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), p. 82.

[3] E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1980), pp. 63, 77-8, et passim.

CHAPTER TWO

[1] Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters, passim.

[2] Butler, p. 73.

[3] Maria Edgeworth, "Ennui," in Tales of Fashionable Life, Vol. VI of Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. 60. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[4] Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters, p. 58.

[5] Butler, p. 210.

[6] Butler, pp. 200-01.

[7] Germaine de Staël, Corinne (Paris: Garnier Frères, n.d.), p. 504.

[8] Sydney Owenson, The Wild Irish Girl (London: Richard Phillips, 1806), I, 188.

[9] Maria Edgeworth, Patronage (London: J.M. Dent, 1893), I, 75-76.

[10] Frances Burney, Evelina (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. xxxi.

[11] Amelia Opie, The Father and Daughter (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1801), p. 44.

[12] "Art. IV," British Review, 4(October 1812), 64.

[13] "Tales of Fashionable Life," The Universal Magazine, 12(September 1809), 214-15.

[14] Universal Magazine, 217.

[15] "Tales of Fashionable Life," The Lady's Monthly Museum, 7(October 1809), 211.

[16] Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Practical Education, New ed. (London: R. Hunter, Cradock, Baldwin and Joy, 1815), II, 211-13.

[17] Maria Edgeworth, "Vivian," in Tales of Fashionable Life, Vol. VIII of Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. 257. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[18] Maria Edgeworth, "Manoeuvring," in Tales of Fashionable Life, Vol. VII of Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. 198. All further references to this work appear in the text.

CHAPTER THREE

[1] "Attention," The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, 1971 ed.

[2] Maria Edgeworth, "Madame de Fleury" in Tales of Fashionable Life, Vol. X of Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. 89. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[3] Butler, p. 331.

[4] Maria Edgeworth, "Almeria," in Tales of Fashionable Life, Vol. VII of Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. 245. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[5] Maria Edgeworth, "Emilie de Coulanges," in Tales of Fashionable Life, Vol. X of Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. 151. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[6] Maria Edgeworth, "The Absentee," in Tales of Fashionable Life, Vol. IX of Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), p. 76. All further references to this work appear in the text.

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